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# Texas

VISIT…

# Frommer's®

# Texas

## 5th Edition

by David Baird, Eric Peterson
& Neil E. Schlecht

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## AN INVITATION TO THE READER

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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## AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.


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## FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS, ICONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system.** In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Finds** | Special finds—those places only insiders know about |
| **Fun Facts** | Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun |
| **Kids** | Best bets for kids, and advice for the whole family |
| **Moments** | Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of |
| **Overrated** | Places or experiences not worth your time or money |
| **Tips** | Insider tips—great ways to save time and money |
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The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE American Express  DISC Discover  V Visa
DC Diners Club  MC MasterCard

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- Podcasts, interactive maps, and up-to-the-minute events listings
- Opinionated blog entries by Arthur Frommer himself
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

# What's New in Texas

## DALLAS

Former president George W. Bush and his wife have returned to Texas and are living full-time in Dallas, site of Laura's alma mater, Southern Methodist University—not coincidentally the big winner in the presidential library sweepstakes.

**EXPLORING DALLAS** The Conspiracy Museum, which was a slightly off-kilter look at the JFK assassination and other possible conspiracies, lost its lease to a sandwich shop and, despite promises, hasn't regrouped. **Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park** is currently closed for renovations, slated to reopen in 2010.

**WHERE TO STAY** The highly anticipated **Ritz-Carlton, Dallas,** 2121 McKinney Ave. (✆ **214/922-0200**), opened in Uptown; its on-site restaurant, Fearing's, has nabbed even more attention than the hotel. Dallas's longtime standard-bearer for luxury, **Mansion on Turtle Creek,** 2821 Turtle Creek Blvd. (✆ **888-ROSEWOOD** [767-3966]), has joined the Rosewood chain of hotels and resorts, though to Dallasites it's still just the Mansion. When the Mansion's celebrity chef, Dean Fearing, left (see below), the hotel gave the well-regarded restaurant's decor and menu a thorough makeover. **Stoneleigh Hotel & Spa,** 2927 Maple Ave. (✆ **800/921-8498**), underwent an even more thorough renovation, completely revamping the 1923 Art Deco hotel and converting it into one of Dallas's chicest properties. The popular and business traveler–friendly Bradford at Lincoln Park has become **Hyatt Summerfield Suites,** 8221 N. Central Expwy. (✆ **866/974-9288**).

**WHERE TO DINE** With his eponymous new restaurant in the new Ritz-Carlton, Dallas, **Fearing's,** 2121 McKinney Ave. (✆ **214/922-4848**), has stolen some of the thunder from fellow Southwestern innovator Stephan Pyles, who opened his own downtown restaurant a couple of years ago. For now, Fearing's, named New Restaurant of the Year in 2008 by *Esquire* magazine, is the magnet for Dallas's movers, shakers, and impossibly beautiful people. Meanwhile, the restaurant Dean Fearing helmed for 2 decades underwent a massive makeover, name change, and reorientation of the menu; it's now called, somewhat awkwardly, **Mansion Restaurant at Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek,** 2821 Turtle Creek Blvd. (✆ **214/443-4747**). The dress code is relaxed, a New Yorker runs the kitchen, and the food is as stellar as ever, if not better. Il Solé, long an Italian mainstay of the Dallas dining scene, went under, as did Rouge, a cool and theatrical Spanish place.

**AFTER DARK** The city's incredible $340-million **Dallas Center for the Performing Arts,** which will include Sir Norman Foster's **Winspear Opera House** and Rem Koolhaas's **Wyly Theater,** is scheduled to open in 2009. The new **Latino Cultural Center,** 2600 Live Oak (✆ **214/670-3320**), hosts a wide variety of Latin-oriented dance, music, theater, and art. Among the bemoaned live music and nightclub deaths: Trees, Club Clearview, Gypsy Tea Room, and Deep Ellum Blues. Seeking to take their places in almost one fell swoop are the **Palladium,** 1135 S. Lamar St. (✆ **972/854-5050**), and **House of Blues Dallas,** 2200 N. Lamar St. (✆ **214/978-2583**), a 60,000-square-foot complex.

For additional information about Dallas, see chapter 5.

## FORT WORTH

**WHERE TO STAY** The **Omni Fort Worth** (✆ **800/THE-OMNI** [843-6664]), a massive luxury hotel (614 rooms) was slightly delayed and will now open in early 2009.

**WHERE TO DINE** Tim Love, of Lonesome Dove Western Bistro fame, sold his restaurant Duce, lost his New York City restaurant, and rebounded by opening the wildly popular **Love Shack,** 110 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/740-8812**), a funky, informal place with sloppy but haute cuisine burgers in the heart of the Stockyards. The excellent restaurant in the boutique Ashton Hotel, 610 Main St. (✆ **817/332-0100**), changed its name to **610 Grille** (from Café Ashton). The owner of Dallas's Daniele Osteria opened the excellent, relaxed **Brix Pizza & Wine Bar,** 2747 S. Hulen St. (✆ **817/924-2749**), serving authentic New York and Italian pies.

**EXPLORING FORT WORTH** The Cattle Raisers Museum closed its independent location in 2007 and will reopen as part of the Museum of Science and History in late 2009.

**AFTER DARK** Club closings include Ridglea and Vine Wineroom, the Black Dog Tavern, and the Wreck Room. Try as it might, **Pete's Dueling Piano Bar,** 621 Houston St. (✆ **817/335-PETE** [335-7383]), a sister piano-cum-karaoke bar of establishments in Dallas and Austin, will have a hard time filling the void.

For additional information about Ft. Worth, see chapter 5.

## HOUSTON

The city is only now beginning to feel the effects of the national economic slowdown. As long as the price of oil was in the stratosphere, the local economy, still anchored by oil production and refining, kept churning along. But alas, no longer. Yet the city has a lot going for it that will cushion the blow. Local businesses are still sufficiently dynamic to support moderate housing construction, and recovery from the damage caused by Hurricane Ike has meant keeping contractors busy and insurance money flowing in. Signs of the damage wrought by the hurricane are vanishing in the central city and will hardly be noticeable by the spring of 2009. On the coast, it's a different story.

**WHERE TO STAY** There's a large surplus of hotel rooms in the downtown area, and as a consequence, normal prices for downtown hotel rooms have fallen considerably and promotional rates, even for some luxury hotels, are everywhere. Visitors are well advised to shop around.

The most recent addition to the hotel scene is **Hotel ZaZa,** 5701 Main St. (✆ **888/880-3244**), opened much later than anticipated but worth the wait. It weds the ideal location of the old Warwick Hotel, at the center of the Museum District in the most verdant part of the city, with the flair and enthusiasm of a boutique hotel.

**WHERE TO DINE** The small restaurant **17,** 1117 Prairie St. (✆ **832/200-8888**), in the Alden-Houston Hotel, has changed chefs again. And with each change of chef, this restaurant actually seems to be improving. The new chef, Wes Morton, hails from Louisiana and has been cooking at well-known restaurants on both coasts. His work is impeccable. **Indika,** 516 Westheimer Rd. (✆ **713/524-2170**), has moved into the Montrose area from its original location in the far west suburbs. This move is good for visitors, who can now explore a bit more of Houston's dynamic restaurant scene without leaving the city's core.

For additional information about Houston, see chapter 6.

## GULF COAST

**GALVESTON** It's hard to tell what the ultimate effects of Hurricane Ike will be on Galveston and the coastal communities along Galveston Bay. The storm came ashore in September 2008 and all but destroyed the beach towns of Bolivar Peninsula, on the eastern side of the mouth of the bay. It will take years for these communities to come back, if at all. The damage to Galveston, protected as it was by a seawall, was extensive, but was mainly flooding. Ike's impact in this case might be mainly economic in that it will encourage many local businesses to relocate, ultimately shrinking the local economy. The extensive renovation of the historic East End district, a product of years of work, is now at risk. In worse condition are the tracts of beach houses on the island's western side. These, which lie beyond the seawall, were exposed to wind and water. Many are of light frame construction and have lost roofs, walls, and porches. The beaches on this side were severely eroded.

**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND** This resort city was hit by Hurricane Dolly in July 2008. Dolly was considerably milder than Ike, causing less than a tenth of the damage. The city is fully up and running and ready for the annual onslaught of college kids for spring break.

For more about the Gulf Coast, see chapter 7.

## SAN ANTONIO

Renovation to the city's **Main Plaza,** also called Plaza de las Islas, has been completed. It has made the area fronting San Fernando Cathedral and the Bexar County Courthouse both an urban green space and a social space for the city's denizens. Meanwhile, the extension of the **River Walk** in both directions from downtown continues at a measured pace.

**WHERE TO STAY** The Columns on Alamo has changed hands and names. The new owners are making extensive changes to the **King William Manor,** 1037 S. Alamo (✆ **800/405-0367**), including an outdoor pool and newly landscaped grounds.

**WHERE TO DINE** The well-known chef Andrew Weissman, owner of Le Rêve, opened a small restaurant around the corner from his first restaurant. **Sandbar,** 152 E. Pecan St. (✆ **210/222-2426**), serves the freshest seafood you're going to get anywhere. Open for dinner only.

**EXPLORING SAN ANTONIO** The **Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum,** 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave. (✆ **210/824-5368**), has completed an ambitious expansion that nearly doubles its gallery space. The new addition is modern and airy, yet somehow doesn't detract from this museum's intimate feel. The design makes use of natural light, filtered and adjusted to match the needs of any particular exhibition.

Read more about San Antonio in chapter 8.

## AUSTIN

**WHERE TO STAY** A remarkable new property, opened in December 2008, is **Hotel Saint Cecilia,** 112 Academy Dr. (✆ **512/852-2400**), with 14 large, ultra-plush rooms, featuring stereos with turntables (and a large vinyl collection in reception) and handmade Swedish mattresses. It's located near Austin's hip South Congress Avenue.

**Lake Austin Spa Resort,** 1705 S. Quinlan Park Rd. (✆ **800/847-5637**), won top honors on *Condé Nast*'s list of favorite spa resorts for 2008. It is indeed a beautiful property and is a favorite with both visitors and locals.

**WHERE TO DINE** Las Manitas, a famous restaurant in downtown Austin, closed its doors for good, a victim of development. Another well-known restaurant, **Mother's Café & Garden** (✆ **512/451-3994**), a vegetarian restaurant in Hyde Park, has reopened. It suffered heavy fire damage in 2007, and has come back

strong, with a more attractive dining area. **Cipollina,** 1213 W. Lynn (✆ **512/477-5211**), reinvented itself as a small neighborhood Italian bistro with reasonable prices and fine dining based on local ingredients.

**EXPLORING AUSTIN** In the summer of 2008, a fire, deliberately set by unknown delinquents, seriously damaged the **Governor's Mansion.** The mansion was closed for remodeling at the time of the fire, and the governor and his wife were living elsewhere. The fire caused extensive damage to the structure of the mansion, but the furnishings were largely spared because they had been moved off-site for the renovation. So far, there is no target date for reopening.

**SHOPPING** **Tesoros Trading Co.** (✆ **512/447-7500**), the large and entertaining importer store, has relocated to South Austin, at 1500 S. Congress Ave., where it's part of the engaging restaurant and shopping area that has grown up on this stretch of the avenue.

For more about Austin, see chapter 9.

## WEST TEXAS

**EL PASO** A slick new **El Paso Museum of History,** 510 N. Santa Fe St. (✆ **915/351-3588**), opened downtown in 2007, and is a great improvement over its predecessor on the city's east side.

Across the Rio Grande in Juárez, 2008 was one of the worst years for drug violence in history. While tourists have not been a target, it is especially important to remain vigilant and to travel in a group if you do cross. Also, passports are now required for reentry into the United States from Mexico.

**DEL RIO** **La Hacienda,** 330 Pecan St. in Pecan Street Station (✆ **830/774-7094**), and **The Herald,** 321 S. Main St. (✆ **830/774-2845**), are relatively new restaurants that have emerged as local standouts. For more about West Texas, see chapter 10.

## BIG BEND & GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARKS

**BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK** Homeland Security policy continues to ban the tradition of park visitors crossing the Rio Grande into adjacent Mexican villages.

New lodging options abound in Terlingua Ghost Town, including the ruin–turned–romantic getaway **La Posada Milagro,** 100 Milagro Rd. (✆ **432/371-3044**), and the newly restored **Holiday Hotel,** behind the Terlingua Trading Company (✆ **432/371-2234**). The proprietors of the Holiday have also been restoring numerous houses in the area for overnight guests.

**CARLSBAD CAVERNS NATIONAL PARK** Southern New Mexico has a new area code: 575.

See chapter 11 for more about these national parks.

## THE PANHANDLE PLAINS

**AMARILLO** Opening in late 2008, a solid new hotel is the **Hilton Garden Inn,** 900 I-40 W. (✆ **800/321-3232**).

After a complete renovation, the **American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum,** 2601 I-40 E. (✆ **806/376-5181**), reopened in 2007—the project was more than worth the wait.

In Vega, 35 miles west of Amarillo, a fun new restaurant opened in 2007: the **Boot Hill Saloon & Grill,** 909 Vega Blvd. (✆ **806/267-2904**).

**LUBBOCK** A new winery started up in 2008, **McPherson Cellars Winery,** 1615 Texas Ave. (✆ **806/687-9463**). There is a major new hotel in the works, the **Overton Hotel & Conference Center,** on 4th Street just east of University Avenue (✆ **806/776-7000**), slated to open in fall 2009.

See chapter 12 for more about the Panhandle Plains.

1

# The Best of Texas

*by David Baird, Eric Peterson & Neil Edward Schlecht*

In this chapter, we've put together lists of our favorite experiences, destinations, and services to help you plan your own Texas travels.

## 1 THE BEST LUXURY & HISTORIC HOTELS

- **The Adolphus Hotel** (Dallas; ✆ **800/221-9083** or 214/742-8200): This landmark Beaux Arts hotel, built by beer baron Adolphus Busch, looks and feels like a European château. Luxuriate among dark-wood parlors, baroque art and antiques, and an opulent dining room, one of Big D's best restaurants. Rooms are English country style, and a three-course English tea is served every afternoon. See p. 85.
- **Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek** (Dallas; ✆ **800/422-3408** or 214/599-2100): Repeatedly named one of the top five hotels in the United States, the Mansion draws movie stars, princes, presidents, and luxury mavens. Formerly the grand estate of a cotton magnate in the 1920s and 1930s, the Mansion is refined and supremely elegant throughout, with service to match. The revamped restaurant has again vaulted to the top of the heap. See p. 89.
- **Hotel Zaza** (Dallas; ✆ **800/597-8399** or 214/468-8399): This super fashionable Uptown boutique hotel has a catchy name and a cachet few can match. It is luxurious but überhip, with eclectic style to burn. The hotel has "concept" suites with funky themes ("Shag-a-delic" Suite, anyone?) and new, fantasyland "Magnificent Seven" suites. See p. 90.
- **Stockyards Hotel** (Fort Worth; ✆ **800/423-8471** or 817/625-6427): Over-the-top luxury would be gauche in the old Stockyards, so this extremely comfortable and authentic slice of the Old West qualifies as a Fort Worth indulgence: cowboy luxury. Outlaws on the run, cowpokes and their madames, and the C&W elite have all propped up their boots here. Cowtown's cattle-ranching and railroad past are effortlessly evoked in the rooms, each of which is different. See p. 126.
- **Four Seasons Hotel Houston** (Houston; ✆ **800/332-3442** or 713/650-1300): Lots of space to stretch out in and lots of service so you don't have to stretch too far. This hotel surpasses all others in amenities and services. Within a few blocks are the baseball park, the basketball arena, a shopping mall, and the convention center. A bit beyond that are the city's theater and nightlife hubs. See p. 168.
- **Hotel Derek** (Houston; ✆ **866/292-4100** or 713/961-3000): The most comfortable and most fun place to stay in Houston's highly popular Uptown/Galleria area. The Derek offers a rare combination of practicality and style, making it a perfect choice for the business traveler or the vacation shopper. Service is smooth, and the restaurant wins raves from the local food writers. See p. 175.

- **Lancaster Hotel** (Houston; ✆ **800/231-0336** or 713/228-9500): Personal service, charming rooms, and great location are the keys to this hotel's success. If there's one hotel that makes having a car unnecessary in Houston, this is it. Within easy walking distance are the symphony, the opera, three theaters, the ballet, a multiplex cinema, and several restaurants and clubs. See p. 169.
- **Omni Corpus Christi Hotel** (Corpus Christi; ✆ **800/843-6664** or 361/887-1600): The two towers of the Omni overlook Corpus Christi Bay, and the floor-to-ceiling windows of the 20-story Bayfront Tower offer spectacular views of the Gulf, particularly from its upper floors. Pamper yourself with a massage from the in-house massage therapist or relax in the whirlpool. See p. 230.
- **Isla Grand Beach Resort** (South Padre Island; ✆ **800/292-7704** or 956/761-6511): From the high-ceilinged lobby to the beautiful landscaping around the swimming pools, this resort spells luxury. Many rooms have grand views of the ocean. See p. 250.
- **Omni La Mansión del Río** (San Antonio; ✆ **800/830-1400** or 210/518-1000): Occupying what was once the local seminary, this hotel has kept the local feel of the building, with architectural features such as beamed ceilings and stone balconies. La Mansión is not a high-rise, and it enjoys a wide frontage along the River Walk. It is, in short, the best hotel for experiencing San Antonio. See p. 264.
- **The Watermark Hotel & Spa** (San Antonio; ✆ **866/605-1212** or 210/396-5800): If relaxation and pampering are what you seek, the Watermark should be your choice in San Antonio. From the moment you step foot into the lobby, everything is taken care of effortlessly. The hotel has a great location on the River Walk, but the rooms are so attractive and comfortable, the service is so personal, and the spa is so easy to enjoy that you may never leave. See p. 264.
- **The Driskill** (Austin; ✆ **800/252-9367** or 512/474-5911): If you want to play cattle baron, you can't do better than stay in this opulent 1886 hotel, restored to its former glory at the end of the 20th century. See p. 307.
- **Four Seasons Austin** (Austin; ✆ **800/332-3442** or 512/478-4500): With panoramic views of the lake, the wonderful service that this chain is known for, and a spa that consistently wins high praise, nothing is lacking here. Rooms are large and comfortable and come with all the amenities. Right outside the door is Austin's popular hike-and-bike trail, which rings the lake, and Austin's comfortable and fun downtown. See p. 307.
- **Lake Austin Spa Resort** (Austin; 1705 S. Quinlan Park Rd.; ✆ **800/847-5637**): This spa resort gets more write-ups than any other lodging in Austin, most recently as best destination spa in the country by the readers of *Condé Nast Traveler*. Nothing spells luxury better than the pampering spa treatments this place is known for. But you can also find it in the beauty and serenity that surround the place. See p. 316.
- **Cibolo Creek Ranch** (Shafter; ✆ **432/229-3737**): Tucked under the Chinati Mountains in some of the most wide-open country in all of Texas, this is a getaway for the most special of occasions, and accordingly priced. The idyllic setting plays host today to a first-class resort, featuring picture-perfect guest rooms with red-tile floors, adobe walls, and sumptuous border decor. The recreation is as impressive as the scenery. See p. 370.
- **Gage Hotel** (Marathon; ✆ **432/386-4205**): Located 50 miles north of Big Bend National Park, the historic Gage

Hotel opened in 1927 as the social hub for ar ea ranchers and miners, but fell into shambles under the deser t sun in the ensuing decades. B ut that period is long over: The current owners restored the old r edbrick's many charms in the early 1980s, melding history and an eye for Texas chic. The historic r ooms have cow-skin rugs, hardwood floors, Navajo blankets, and oodles of personality. See p. 400.

## 2 THE BEST BED & BREAKFASTS & BOUTIQUE HOTELS

- **Hôtel S t. G ermain** (D allas; ✆ **214/871-2516**): E ver wanted to stay with your spouse at a plush bor dello? This intimate boutique hotel and elegant, prix-fixe r estaurant is about as close as you'll come to that fantasy. A gorgeous mix of early-20th-centur y F rance and New O rleans, the sev en suites ar e so swank, with such pampering features as wood-burning fir eplaces, draped Napoleón sleigh beds, bidets, and soaking tubs, that y ou may not want to leave. See p. 88.
- **Belmont H otel** (D allas; ✆ **866/870-8010** or 214/393-2000): Dallas usually goes gaga o ver mirr ored glass and brand-spanking-new buildings, so it 's a refreshing change to find this vintage 1940s motor lodge in O ak Cliff transformed into a stylish, r etro-styled boutique hotel. With its cool lounge bar and midcentur y-modern decor , it 's a dollop of P alm S prings with the attitude of A ustin and vie ws of the D allas skyline. See p. 87.
- **The A shton H otel** (F ort Worth; ✆ **866/327-4866** or 817/332-0100): Just off Sundance Square, this boutique hotel—Fort Worth's only small luxur y hotel—offers plush r ooms and smooth service, as well as, in 610 G rille, one of the best restaurants in North Texas. See p. 131.
- **Etta's Place** (Fort Worth; ✆ **866/355-5760** or 817/255-5760): A cozy and relaxing small hotel that feels like a B&B is just a hear tbeat fr om F ort Worth's charming nightlife, shops, and restaurants of Sundance Square. It bears the name of E tta P lace, the handsome girlfriend of the Sundance Kid, who no doubt would appr ove of the spacious, modern r ooms with lots of light and Texas touches. Kick back in the clubb y library and music rooms. See p. 132.
- **La Colombe d'Or** (H ouston; ✆ **713/524-7999**): H ave a four-course F rench dinner ser ved in y our suite 's separate dining r oom. With such personal service and with only five suites, there's no way you'll get lost in the shuffle. O ccupying a mansion built for an oil ty coon in the 1920s, the hotel has uncommon architectural featur es, and is furnished with antiques. Its location in H ouston's Montrose D istrict puts it squar ely in the middle of the hippest par t of town. See p. 173.
- **George Blucher House Bed & B reakfast I nn** (Corpus Christi; ✆ **866/884-4884** or 361/884-4884): This wonderful B&B combines the ambience of an elegant historic home—it was built in 1904—with modern amenities. B reakfasts ar e ser ved b y candlelight, and y ou're just acr oss the str eet from a prime bir d-watching ar ea. S ee p. 230.
- **Ogé H ouse I nn on the Riv er Walk** (San Antonio; ✆ **800/242-2770** or 210/223-2353): The King William area abounds with B&Bs, but the O gé House stands out as much for its pr ofessional ser vice as for its gorgeous mansion and lovely rooms. See p. 268.

- **Mansion at Judges Hill** (Austin; ✆ **800/311-1619** or 512/495-1800): A room in the original mansion evokes the feel of a more relaxed and gracious era, especially the second-floor rooms which have a large and inviting porch, tempting one to linger and enjoy the view. The friendly and helpful service reinforces the feeling. See p. 314.
- **Hotel Saint Cecilia** (Austin; ✆ **512/852-2400**): This new hotel captures the feel for what's fun about the Austin scene. It also takes comfort to an entirely new level: Sleep deeply on a handmade Swedish mattress; greet the morning with whatever your favorite crepe is; lounge on the private deck or patio of your room; or spin some vinyl on your in-room turntable. See p. 313.
- **Villa del Rio Bed & Breakfast** (Del Rio; ✆ **800/995-1887** or 830/768-1100): A luxurious Mediterranean-style villa—actually a mix of Italian and Mexican styles—built in 1887, the Villa del Rio gets our vote for the best place to stay in this area for anyone who appreciates old-world ambience and pampering and an exciting breakfast. See p. 385.

## 3 THE BEST HOTEL BARGAINS

- **Hyatt Summerfield Suites** (Dallas; ✆ **866/974-9288** or 214/696-1555): This straightforward, residential-style hotel primarily targets businesspeople but is also superb for other travelers and families. The spacious suites have fully equipped kitchens, and there are a pool and small spa, an exercise room, and a business center. See p. 92.
- **Lovett Inn** (Houston; ✆ **800/779-5224** or 713/522-5224): This B&B offers attractive, comfortable rooms with private balconies for a low price. Add a pool and a central location that is handy but quiet, and you have a winning combination. See p. 173.
- **Best Western Sunset Suites—Riverwalk** (San Antonio; ✆ **866/560-6000** or 210/223-4400): Low room rates, lots of free perks, and a convenient location near downtown—not to mention superattractive rooms in a historic structure. See p. 267.
- **Austin Motel** (Austin; ✆ **512/441-1157**): Look for the classic neon sign in Austin's hip SoCo area. The rooms have been individually furnished, many in fun and funky styles, but the place retains its 1950s character and its lower-than-1990s prices. See p. 313.
- **Travelodge Hotel—La Hacienda Airport** (El Paso; ✆ **800/772-4231** or 915/772-4231): Some roadside motels surprise you with their attention to detail—this is definitely one of them. We like the eight Jacuzzi rooms, featuring picture windows that separate the tubs from the bedrooms, and the spacious and amusingly decorated family suites. See p. 359.

## 4 THE BEST RESTAURANTS

- **The French Room** (Dallas; ✆ **214/742-8200**): This formal but not intimidating restaurant in the historic Adolphus Hotel is dreamy—like dining at Versailles. Indulge in superb classic French cuisine and museum-quality wines surrounded by a rococo-painted ceiling, flowing drapes, and crystal chandeliers. See p. 94.

- **Fearing's** (Dallas; ✆ **214/922-4848**): Legendary, cowboy boot–clad chef Dean Fearing made his name as an innovator of Southwestern cuisine at the Mansion on Turtle Creek. At long last, he has opened his own place within the swanky new Ritz-Carlton upton. Named *Esquire* magazine's New Restaurant of the Year in 2008, it may just be the finest thing about one of the most buzz-worthy new destinations in Dallas—something to see, and a place to be seen. And the food? Outstanding. See p. 97.
- **Mansion Restaurant at Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek** (Dallas; ✆ **214/443-4747**): After the departure of its famous chef Dean Fearing, a head-to-boot makeover, and a new whopper of a name, the Mansion is back, and maybe just better than ever. The tried-and-true but a little tired Southwestern menu was scrapped, replaced by a more cosmopolitan and sophisticated New American cuisine. The restaurant is more contemporary, relaxed, and inviting. See p. 97.
- **610 Grille** (Fort Worth; ✆ **817/332-0100**): The creative New American bistro fare at this swank restaurant, in a boutique hotel of the same description, quickly shot to the top of everyone's best-of lists in Fort Worth. Hotel dining is rarely this good or this intimate. See p. 137.
- **Lanny's Alta Cocina Mexicana** (Fort Worth; ✆ **817/850-9996**): The great-grandson of the man behind Fort Worth's standard for Tex-Mex, Joe T. Garcia's, has struck out on his own with this sensational fine-dining take on Mediterranean cooking with Mexican sensibilities. Sophisticated but unfussy, it's *the* place to dine in downtown Fort Worth. See p. 137.
- **Mark's** (Houston; ✆ **713/523-3800**): No fussy French nouvelle here, and no boring steak and potatoes either. Mark's serves up dishes that satisfy while they fulfill our eternal quest for something new and creative. This is New American cooking as it should be. See p. 182.
- **Cafe Annie** (Houston; ✆ **713/840-1111**): No other restaurant in Houston garners the attention that this place does from foodies and food critics alike. With innovative Southwestern cooking, the best wine list in the city, and a master sommelier (the only "master" in Texas), the restaurant has its credentials. Chef/owner Robert Del Grande offers up wonderful dishes that show just how fertile the crossbreeding of Mexican and American cooking can be. See p. 189.
- **Le Rêve** (San Antonio; ✆ **210/212-2221**): Regularly designated the best restaurant in Texas, Le Rêve never disappoints. Owner/chef Andrew Weissman is exacting in the practice of his craft and produces a dining experience that is close to being other worldly. See p. 274.
- **Uchi** (Austin; ✆ **512/916-4808**): Don't think of this restaurant as just a good place for sushi and Japanese cuisine. It's a great restaurant, period, with creative cooking that transcends its humble roots. The setting, in a beautifully revamped 1930s house, is transcendent, too. See p. 319.
- **Café Central** (El Paso; ✆ **915/545-2233**): Well worth the splurge, Café Central is a sleek urban bistro serving sophisticated international cuisine. The menu changes daily, but always offers a wide range of standout fare—most notably creative Southwestern interpretations of traditional Continental dishes. The wine list is one of the city's best, and desserts include the best *leches* (Mexican milk cakes) in all of Texas. See p. 360.

## 5 THE BEST TEXAN DINING

- **Sonny Bryan's Smokehouse** (Dallas; ✆ **214/357-7120**): Sonny Bryan's has been turning out sweet barbecue since 1910, and the little smoke shack has acquired legendary status. Salesmen perch on their car hoods with their sleeves rolled up and wolf down hickory-smoked brisket, sliced-beef sandwiches, and succulent onion rings. Thinner sorts squeeze into tiny one-armed school desks and get ready to douse their brisket with superb, tangy sauce. A classic. See p. 101.
- **Bob's Steak & Chop House** (Dallas; ✆ **214/528-9446**): Bob's will satisfy the steak connoisseur—the real Texan—in you. With a clubby but relaxed mahogany look and behemoth wet-aged prime beef and sirloin filets, this is a place for the J. R. crowd. Even the accompaniments—"smashed" potatoes and honey-glazed whole carrots—are terrific. And the meat-shy need not fear: The chophouse salad is a meal in itself. Cigar aficionados should keep their noses trained for Bob's cigar dinners: Every course is served with a different cigar. See p. 97.
- **Lonesome Dove Western Bistro** (Fort Worth; ✆ **817/740-8810**): This friendly and eclectic restaurant challenges Cowtown to broaden its horizons. The Southwestern menu at this Stockyards eatery successfully stretches the popular theme in new ways, adding unique Texas touches that are both avant-garde and comforting. Pop in for the inexpensive Stockyards lunch special or dive into a blowout dinner. See p. 134.
- **Angelo's** (Fort Worth; ✆ **817/332-0357**): Fort Worth's classic Texas barbecue joint is as unpretentious as they come: Its wood paneling, mounted deer and buffalo heads, metal ceiling fans, and Formica tables might have come from a Jaycees lodge. That's kitschy cool to some, meaningless to everyone else. What is important is the fantastic hickory-smoked barbecue. See p. 138.
- **Loma Linda** (Houston; ✆ **713/924-6074**): Bursting the bubble of a perfectly puffed tortilla smothered in chile con queso is the moment where anticipation meets realization in the Tex-Mex experience. The aroma, the texture, the taste . . . words fail us. You can scour the borderlands a long time before coming up with an old-fashioned Tex-Mex joint like this one. The restaurant even has its own special tortilla maker for producing these puffed-up beauties. See p. 182.
- **Gaidos** (Galveston; ✆ **409/762-9625**): Offering traditional cooking as it is practiced on the Texas Gulf Coast, Gaidos is the keeper of the flame for seafood devoid of fads and trends. The family has been serving up stuffed snapper, gumbo, and fried oysters for four generations. See p. 220.
- **La Playa** (Corpus Christi; ✆ **361/980-3909**): For a Tex-Mex restaurant to be considered truly great, it must, of course, do a good job with the traditional enchiladas in chili gravy, have excellent fajitas, and pay attention to the details in cooking the rice and beans. It helps if it has a signature dish or two. In this case, it's deep-fried avocados. See p. 231.
- **La Playa** (Port Aransas; ✆ **361/749-0022**): This place is in no way connected to La Playa of Corpus Christi. But the cooking is just as local, with Tex-Mex-style seafood dishes such as *campechana* cocktails and fish tacos. The margaritas transcend cultures. La Playa has that hominess and welcoming feel that is as much Texas as anything else. See p. 240.

- **Mi Tierra** (San Antonio; ✆ **210/225-1262**): Some people dismiss this cafe as touristy. Not so. It is the practitioner of old San Antonio cooking traditions. Order any of the Tex-Mex specialties and sit back and enjoy the ambience—both the food and the decor are expressions of local tastes when celebrating is called for. And travelers may celebrate once they've hit upon this gem. See p. 276.
- **Shady Grove** (Austin; ✆ **512/474-9991**): This is the most quintessentially Austin restaurant in town. It offers a laid-back Texan menu, a huge outdoor patio, and an "unplugged" music series. See p. 321.
- **L&J Café** (El Paso; ✆ **915/566-8418**): An El Paso landmark since 1927, the L&J is inexpensive and offers some of the best Tex-Mex food you'll find anywhere. The chicken enchiladas, overflowing with fluffy meat and buried under chunky green chile and jack cheese, approach perfection. It doesn't hurt that the salsa is spicy, the beer is cold, and the service is quick and friendly, even when the place is filled to capacity—as it is most of the time. See p. 361.
- **Starlight Theatre** (Terlingua; ✆ **432/371-2326**): A 1930s movie palace abandoned when the mines in Terlingua went bust in the following decade, the Starlight Theatre was reborn as an eatery and watering hole in 1991. The stage is still here, but the silver screen takes a back seat to the food (especially the trademark enchiladas, filet mignon, and sautéed chicken), drink (namely Texas beers and prickly pear margaritas), and desserts (the cobbler for two is legendary). See p. 400.



## 6 THE BEST LONE STAR EXPERIENCES

- **Hopping Aboard the Grapevine Vintage Railroad:** The Old West comes alive aboard the Tarantula Railroad. A nostalgic train (when running, a restored 1896 steam locomotive called *Puffy*) rumbles along the track from Stockyards Station in Fort Worth, tracing the route of the Chisholm Trail, to the Cotton Belt Depot in historic Grapevine, Texas, a town with 75 restored turn-of-the-20th-century buildings. See p. 143.
- **Lassoing the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo:** Fort Worth ain't called Cowtown for nothing. In late January and early February, the Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show, as it's officially called, recalls the glory cowboy days with horse shows, auctions, and livestock from beef cattle to llamas and swine. The nightly rodeos are big draws. See "Fort Worth," in chapter 5.
- **Attending a Mariachi Mass at Mission San José:** The Alamo may be more famous, but hearing a congregation of San Antonians raise their voices in spirited prayer reminds you that the city's Spanish missions aren't just, well, history. See p. 284.
- **Tubing on the River:** In central Texas, upstream from the town of Gruene, is a stretch of the Guadalupe River that Texans love to float down "leisurely like" in tubes (one tube per person and one for the ice chest). During the late spring and early summer the air is hot, the water is cold, and the "tuber" (tube-potato?) finds life most agreeable. There is no shortage of outfitters who can set you up with a tube. See p. 289.
- **Explore Tejas/Cross the Border:** There are nearly 800 miles of Texas-Mexico border, and the Rio Grande from the Gulf of Mexico to El Paso is a fascinating region. We are big fans of Ciudad

Acuña, across the river from Del Rio, and the amazing canyons in Big Bend National Park, but the entire "borderlands" region is more attractive and diverse than most visitors realize. See chapters 10 and 11.

- **Exploring Big Bend National Park:** Vast and wild, this rugged terrain harbors thousands of species of plants and animals—some seen practically nowhere else on earth. A visit can include a hike into the sun-baked desert, a float down a majestic river through the canyons, or a trek among high mountains where bears and mountain lions rule. See "Big Bend National Park," in chapter 11.

## 7 THE BEST MUSEUMS



- **Nasher Sculpture Center** (Dallas): This world-class collection of modern sculpture is in the downtown Dallas Arts District. Ray Nasher and his wife, Patsy, spent 4 decades assembling what has been called the finest private collection in the world (it includes superlative works by Miró, David Smith, Brancuşi, Moore, Giacometti, Picasso, Matisse, Calder, and many more). Designed by Renzo Piano, it has a gorgeous open-air sculpture garden with landscape design by Peter Walker. See p. 105.
- **Meadows Museum of Art** (Dallas): In a building with plenty of room to show off the greatest collection of Spanish masters outside Spain, the Meadows was built by a Dallas oilman fascinated by Spanish art. The museum proudly displays a wealth of works by Velázquez, Goya, Ribera, Murillo, Zurbarán—just about all the biggies from Spain's golden era as well as the 20th-century masters Picasso, Dalí, and Miró. See p. 109.
- **Kimbell Art Museum** (Fort Worth): Probably the country's finest small museum, this masterwork by Louis Kahn is a joyous celebration of architecture and a splendid collection of art to boot. Kahn's graceful building, a wonder of technology and natural light, is now a chapter in architectural studies worldwide. The small permanent collection ranges from prehistoric Asian and pre-Columbian pieces to European old masters, Impressionists, and modern geniuses. The Kimbell also gets some of the world's most important traveling shows. See p. 145.
- **Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth** (Fort Worth): In a modernist building designed by Japanese architect Tadao Ando, the Modern—actually the oldest art museum in Texas—is the nation's second largest dedicated to contemporary and modern art. The permanent collection includes works by Picasso, Rothko, Warhol, Rauschenberg, and Pollock. See p. 146.
- **Amon Carter Museum of Western Art** (Fort Worth): This museum has one of the finest collections of Western and American art in the country, including the most complete group of works by Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, two behemoths of Western art. It also possesses a great photography collection and important paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe and others. See p. 143.
- **Menil Collection** (Houston): One of the great private collections of the world, it could very well have ended up in Paris or New York, but was graciously bestowed by the collectors on their adopted city. To experience the Menil is pure delight; very little comes between the viewer and the art, which includes works by many of the 20th-century masters, classical works from the ancients, and tribal art from around the world. See p. 196.
- **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** (Houston): With the addition of the

Audrey Jones Beck Building, this museum has doubled its exhibition space and has put its collection of Impressionist and baroque art in the best possible light. The museum has several satellite facilities and attracts major touring exhibitions. See p. 194.

- **The Center for the Arts & Sciences** (Brazosport): The Center is one of those rare entities that does a lot of things exceptionally well, including a terrific natural history museum, a delightful small planetarium, an attractive art gallery, two theaters for a variety of performing arts events, and a nature trail. See p. 221.
- **San Antonio Museum of Art** (San Antonio): Almost as impressive for its architecture as for its holdings, this museum combines several castlelike buildings of the 1904 Lone Star Brewery. The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art is the most comprehensive collection of its kind in the United States. See p. 283.
- **Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum** (San Antonio): A beautiful collection beautifully located and beautifully displayed. This small museum is a delight to visit, especially for fans of modern art, who will devour its collection of works by the modern masters. See p. 283.
- **McDonald Observatory** (northwest of Fort Davis): McDonald Observatory is considered one of the world's best astronomical research facilities. Twice a day visitors can glimpse sunspots, flares, and other solar activity. Nighttime "Star Parties" are held 3 evenings a week, during which visitors can view constellations and celestial objects through the observatory's high-powered telescopes. See p. 366.
- **Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum** (Canyon): The largest history museum in Texas, this excellent museum is anything but a dusty collection of spurs and bits. Well thought out, engaging, and informative, it is largely hands-on—you can sit in a Ford Mustang and listen to Buddy Holly tunes or try out a sidesaddle. There are also comprehensive exhibits on the region's history in terms of petroleum, art, transportation, Western heritage, and paleontology/geology. See p. 430.

## 8 THE BEST SHOPPING

- **Neiman Marcus** (Dallas): Established in 1907, Neiman Marcus is intimately identified with Big D and its shopaholics. The luxury purveyor's annual holiday catalog, with his-and-her fantasies for the rich, has become an institution. The downtown store is classy and retro-cool, the best place in North Texas to drape yourself in Prada and Chanel. See p. 115.
- **NorthPark Center** (Dallas): Dallas loves to shop, and while there are more malls than most people (except Dallasites) know what to do with, NorthPark is the most traditional and elegant (even with a recent expansion that doubled its size). The graceful layout outclasses its more garish competitors. Rotating pieces from owner Ray Nasher's spectacular collection of modern sculpture are on display throughout. See p. 116.
- **Stockyards National Historic District** (Fort Worth): In Cowtown, looking the part is important. Pick up Western duds—suits and shirts with elegant piping and embroidered yokes that would have made you a star in the Old West, plus cowboy boots and other Western paraphernalia—just steps away from the old Stockyards livestock pens. On the main drag is **Maverick,** which has upscale Western wear and a bar serving

up Lone Star longnecks. **M. L. Leddy's** is a family-owned shop with a big boot sign out front and top-quality hats, hand-tooled belts, and custom-made boots. And just down the street, plunk down the cash for exquisite custom cowboy boots at **Ponder Boot Company.** See "Fort Worth," in chapter 5.

- **Uptown** (Houston): In this relatively small district, you can find Houston's Galleria (with over 300 retailers, including Saks, Neiman Marcus, Tiffany's, and Versace) and four other malls fronting Post Oak (with such retailers as Cartier and FAO Schwarz). See "Shopping," in chapter 6.
- **Paris Hatters** (San Antonio): Pope John Paul II, Prince Charles, Jimmy Smits, and Dwight Yoakam have all had Western headgear made for them by Paris Hatters, in business since 1917 and still owned by the same family. About half of the sales are special order, but the shelves are stocked with high-quality ready-to-wear hats, too. See p. 291.
- **Capitol Saddlery** (Austin): The custom-made boots of this classic three-level Western store near the capitol, run by the same family for 7 decades, were immortalized in a song by Jerry Jeff Walker. Come here for hand-tooled saddles, belts, tack, and altogether unyuppified cowboy gear. See p. 337.
- **Fredericksburg** (Texas Hill Country): It's hard to say how a town founded by German idealists ended up being a magnet for Texas materialists, but Fredericksburg's main street is chockablock with boutiques. This is the place to come for everything from natural chocolate mint–scented room deodorizer to handmade dulcimers. See p. 341.
- **El Paso Chile Company** (El Paso): We love this shop for its tongue-searing delicacies, with fiery names such as "Hellfire & Damnation," and all things spicy. See p. 358.

## 9 THE BEST PLACES FOR BOOT-SCOOTIN'

- **Adair's Saloon** (Dallas): Deep Ellum's down-and-dirty honky-tonk is unfazed by the discos, rock clubs, and preppy SMU students in its midst. It sticks to its down-to-earth antistyle, knee-slapping country and redneck rock bands, cheap beer, and tables and walls blanketed in graffiti. See p. 119.
- **Gilley's Dallas** (Dallas): Gilley's is where John Travolta rode a bucking bronco in *Urban Cowboy,* and now Big D has a branch of the famous Houston honky-tonk. If bigger is better, this one's right up there with the best of them: It's got 90,000 square feet of dance floor, bars, and stages. See p. 119.
- **Billy Bob's Texas** (Fort Worth): Kind of like a big-tent country theme park, Billy Bob's has it all: 40 bars, a huge dance floor for two-stepping, pro bull riding, and live performances by big names in country music. And of course dance lessons: Shuffle and two-step like a Texan after a few hours with instructor Wendell Nelson. See p. 119.
- **Pearl's Dancehall & Saloon** (Fort Worth): Perhaps a tad less down-and-dirty than when it was called Big Balls of Cowtown, Pearl's is still a winner. In the shadow of Billy Bob's, it's an intimate spot for live Western swing and honky-tonk and dance lessons every Wednesday. See p. 153.
- **Blanco's** (Houston): This is a genuine honky-tonk where you go for music and dancing, and not for dressing up in Western duds. It's strictly come as you are, and this place attracts 'em from all walks of life, from bankers to oil field workers. The small venue gets some of

the best of Texas's country music bands. See p. 205.

- **Floore's Country Store** (San Antonio): Not much has changed since the 1940s when this honky-tonk, boasting the largest dance floor in South Texas (half an acre), opened up. Boots, hats, and antique farm equipment hang from the ceiling of this typical Texas roadhouse. There's always live music on weekends; Willie Nelson, Dwight Yoakam, Robert Earl Keen, and Lyle Lovett have all played here. See p. 293.
- **Texas Hill Country** (San Antonio and Austin): The Texas Hill Country has some of the best honky-tonks in the state. In Gruene, just outside of New Braunfels, **Gruene Hall** is the oldest country-and-western dance hall in Texas and still one of the mello west places to listen to music. **Arkey Blue & The Silver Dollar Bar** is a genuine spit-and-sawdust cowboy honky-tonk on the Main Street of Bandera. When there's no live music, plug a quarter in the old jukebox and play a country ballad by owner Arkey. And look for the table where Hank Williams, Sr., carved his name. See "Hill Country Side Trips," in chapters 8 and 9.
- **Broken Spoke** (Austin): This is the gen-u-ine item, a Western honky-tonk with a wood-plank floor and a cowboy-hatted, two-steppin' crowd. Still, it's in Austin, so don't be surprised if the band wears Hawaiian shirts, or if tongues are planted firmly in cheeks for some songs. See p. 339.



## 10 THE BEST OF NATURAL TEXAS





- **Dallas Arboretum & Botanical Garden:** Who knew Dallas had more than dust, concrete, steel, and glass? This surprising oasis on the edge of White Rock Lake is a great spot to duck the Texas sun. Relax on 70 acres of groomed gardens and natural woodlands, interspersed with a handful of historic homes. The gardens are especially colorful in spring and fall. See p. 106.
- **Fort Worth Botanic & Japanese Gardens:** A rambling, spacious showcase of 2,500 native and exotic species of plants on 100-plus acres, this is the oldest botanical garden in Texas, created back in the late 1920s. The Texas Rose Garden, 3,500 roses that bloom in late April and October, and the beautiful Japanese Garden are terrific places to hide out from the world. Bring a picnic, a book, and a flying disk. See p. 144.
- **Big Thicket National Preserve:** It has been called "the American Ark" for its incredibly rich variety of plants and wildlife, all packed into 100,000 acres of watery bottomland in deepest East Texas. Explore the area on foot or in canoe, and see how the woods grow so thickly here that they all but blot out the sun, and make trailblazing almost impossible. See "Side Trips to East Texas," in chapter 6.
- **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge:** A mecca for birders, with some 300 species sighted here, the refuge is also home to snakes, turtles, lizards, mammals, and a variety of frogs and other amphibians. Aransas has become famous for being the main winter home of the near-extinct whooping crane, the tallest bird in America—5 feet high with an 8-foot wingspan. See "Rockport," in chapter 7.
- **Mustang Island State Park:** This barrier island has more than 5 miles of wide, sandy beach, with fine sand, few rocks, and broken shells, and almost enough waves for surfing. The park is one of the most popular of Texas state parks, and is especially busy on summer weekends. See "Port Aransas," in chapter 7.

- **Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center:** Few people remember that Lady Bird Johnson started a program to beautify America's highways—and she began practicing it in her home state. This flower-powered research center is a natural outgrowth of this first lady's lifelong efforts to beautify the state. See p. 329.
- **McKittrick Canyon:** The canyon is forested with conifers and deciduous trees. In autumn, the maples, oaks, and other hardwoods burst into color, painting the world in bright colors set off by the rich variety of the evergreens. See "Guadalupe Mountains National Park," in chapter 11.
- **Palo Duro Canyon State Park:** This 60-mile canyon, sculpted by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River over the past 90 million years, is a grand contrast to the ubiquitous, treeless plains of the Texas Panhandle. Its 800-foot cliffs, striped with orange, red, and white rock and adorned by groves of juniper and cottonwood trees, present an astoundingly stark beauty. See "Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park," in chapter 12.

## 11 THE BEST HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS

- **The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza** (Dallas): The events of November 22, 1963, shook the world. John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas is remembered by everyone old enough to remember, and argued over still. Visitors can tour the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, from where the Warren Commission concluded that a single sniper, Lee Harvey Oswald, felled the president. The museum also examines the life, times, and legacy of the Kennedy presidency, making it a place to revisit not only the tragic episode but also an era. See p. 103.
- **The Stockyards National Historic District** (Fort Worth): Still looking the part, this area north of downtown was once the biggest and busiest cattle, horse, mule, hog, and sheep marketing center in the Southwest. Put on your boots and best Western shirt and tour the Livestock Exchange Building; Cowtown Coliseum (the world's first indoor rodeo arena); former hog and sheep pens now filled with Western shops and restaurants; and Billy Bob's Texas, the "world's largest honky-tonk." Then grab a longneck at the White Elephant saloon—the oldest bar in Fort Worth and the site of the city's most famous gunfight in 1897—and check in at the historic Stockyards Hotel. Finally, check out the "longhorn cattle drive" that rumbles down Exchange Avenue daily—or take the Vintage Train into Grapevine. See "Fort Worth," in chapter 5.
- **San Jacinto Monument** (Houston): Here on the battlefield of San Jacinto, a small army of Texans led by General Sam Houston charged the much larger, better equipped Mexican army and dealt them a crushing blow. The victory gave Texas its independence. A monument and museum occupy the battlefield to honor and explain the history of the battle and its significance. See p. 191.
- **USS *Lexington* Museum on the Bay** (Corpus Christi): Exploring this huge World War II–era aircraft carrier offers non-naval persons the opportunity to get an idea of what it was like to live for sometimes months in the claustrophobic conditions of such a limited area. In addition to sleeping, dining, and cooking areas, the ship provided a hospital, a rec room, and, of course, numerous necessary working areas. See p. 228.

- **The Alamo** (San Antonio): It's smaller than you might expect, and it sits smack in the heart of downtown San Antonio; but the graceful mission church that's come to symbolize the state is a must-see, if only to learn what the fuss is all about. See p. 281.
- **San Antonio Missions National Historical Park:** It's impossible not to remember the Alamo when you're in San Antonio; more difficult to recall is that the Alamo was originally just the first of five missions established by the Franciscans along the San Antonio River. Exploring these four missions, built uncharacteristically close to each other, will give you a glimpse of the city's early Spanish and Indian history. See p. 284.
- **State Capitol** (Austin): The country's largest state capitol, second only in size to the U.S. Capitol—but 7 feet taller—underwent a massive restoration and expansion in the 1990s, which left it more impressive than ever. See p. 328.
- **New Braunfels:** Trying to decide which of the Hill Country towns is the most representative of the area's rich German heritage is tough, but the *gemütlich* inns, history-oriented museums, and sausage-rich restaurants—not to mention the major celebration of Oktoberfest—make New Braunfels a standout. See "Hill Country Side Trips from Austin," in chapter 9.
- **El Paso Mission Trail:** Established in the 17th and 18th centuries, these three historic Spanish missions provide a link to El Paso's colonial past. They are among the oldest continually active missions in the country, and warrant a visit for their architectural and historic merit. Especially impressive is the large Presidio Chapel San Elceario, near the site of "The First Thanksgiving," said to have taken place in 1598, 23 years before the Plymouth Thanksgiving. See p. 353.



## 12 THE BEST FAMILY ADVENTURES

- **Old City Park** (Dallas): Modern Dallas gleams with skyscrapers and a love for newness, but its Western heritage lives on museum-like in this facsimile of the Old West, a 13-acre park of historic buildings. Mounted like a late-19th-century village, it has a redbrick Main Street, Victorian homes, train depot, general store, one-room church, schoolhouse, and bank. The "Living Farmstead" re-creates a 19th-century prairie with actors in period garb. See p. 110.
- **The Stockyards** (Fort Worth): Far from a dry old historic district, the Stockyards come alive with the flavor of the Old West. Kids will adore the twice-daily "cattle drive" of the Fort Worth Herd, which rumbles down the cobbled main drag, led by cowhands in 19th-century duds. They'll also love to find their way around the **Cowtown Cattlepen Maze,** a human maze made to look like old cattle pens. See "Fort Worth," in chapter 5.
- **Fort Worth's Children's Museums** (Fort Worth): The **Fort Worth Museum of Science and History** is large and multifaceted, with a domed IMAX theater, a planetarium, and great hands-on science displays. The **National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame** teaches little cowgirls and cowboys about pioneering women of the American West, but in a way that really brings the culture to life: Jukeboxes pump out country tunes, and kids can ride a simulated bucking bronco, see the film of their adventure on the museum's website,

and get their pictures superimposed on Old West film posters. And the **Fort Worth Zoo** is one of the best in the country. See "Fort Worth," in chapter 5.

- **Arlington:** Sandwiched between Dallas and Fort Worth is a kids' suburban dream world: Stumble from the roller coasters at Six Flags Over Texas to the water slides at Hurricane Harbor, visit Ripley's Believe It or Not and the Palace of Wax, and pay your respects to baseball's greats at the Legends of the Game Baseball Museum at the Rangers Ballpark in Arlington. See "Arlington," in chapter 5.
- **Space Center Houston** (Houston): Always the most popular attraction in the city, NASA's Space Center Houston is a joint effort powered by NASA technology and Disney know-how. It is the epitome of interactive display and simulation that manages to fascinate both kids and parents. During your visit, check out what's going on at the Johnson Space Center through a tram ride and video feeds. See p. 192.
- **The Gulf Side of South Padre Island:** Fine white sand and warm water lapping at your toes—what more do you want? Although the shore is lined with hotels and condos, the beaches are public and open to everyone. See "Padre Island National Seashore," in chapter 7.
- **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** (San Antonio): Major thrill rides, a huge swimming pool shaped like Texas, and entertainment/food areas with Texas history themes—there's something for every family member at this theme park, and it's even slightly educational. See p. 285.
- **The Austin Bats:** Most adults and kids tend to finds bats a bit creepy—until they learn more about them, that is. From March to November, you can watch thousands of bats emerge in smoky clouds from under the Congress Avenue Bridge, and find out why Austinites adore the little critters. See "Seeing the Sights," in chapter 9.
- **Balmorhea State Park:** This is one of the crown jewels of the Texas state parks and also one of the smallest, at 45 acres. The main attraction is the massive, 1 3/4-acre swimming pool—3.5 million gallons of water at a fairly constant 74°F (23°C). Not your usual swimming pool, it's teeming with small fish and laden with rocks. Swimming, snorkeling, and scuba diving are all popular. At a tar reconstructed *cienega* (desert wetland) you may spot native wildlife such as a Texas spiny soft-shell turtle, a blotched water snake, or a green heron. See "Small Towns of Central West Texas," in chapter 10.

## 13 THE BEST OF TEXAS ONLINE

- **The Handbook of Texas Online** (www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online): The Handbook is an encyclopedia offering concise entries that explain who's who, what's what, and where's where in Texas. It's easy to use and has information on just about everything, from the locations of towns and counties to explanations of some of the state's legends, to biographical data on the many characters who left their mark on Texas history.
- **Texas Department of Transportation** (www.traveltex.com): The state's official tourism website is practically the only site you'll need to type in—everything else will be a link. We especially like the section that offers easily printable discount coupons, primarily for lodging and attractions.

- **Texas Outside** (www.texasoutside.com): This is a great resource for planning outdoor activities for just about anywhere in the state. It breaks Texas down into different regions and has separate pages for Texas's largest cities. You'll find maps and information on all sorts of outdoor sports, such as hiking, hunting, fishing, biking, and canoeing.
- **Dallas–Fort Worth Area Official Visitors' Website** (www.dfwandbeyond.com): For purely practical matters, this frighteningly bureaucratic-sounding address gives you the lowdown on area events and even allows you to download coupons good for saving a few bucks at museums, theme parks, and other local attractions.
- **Guidelive.com:** The entertainment Web page of the *Dallas Morning News,* North Texas's major newspaper, contains the most current events listings, as well as restaurant, movie, music, and show reviews for both Dallas and Fort Worth. It even has a shopping blog that promises the inside guide to the best local finds and deals.
- **MySanAntonio.com:** The website of the city's only mainstream newspaper, the *San Antonio Express-News,* not only provides the daily news, but also links to local businesses such as dry cleaners and florists (via its Power Pages) and to movie, nightlife, and dining listings and reviews.
- **Austin 360** (www.austin360.com): Movie times, traffic reports, restaurant picks, homes, jobs, cars. . . . This site, sponsored in part by the *Austin-American Statesman,* the city's main newspaper, is a one-stop clicking center for a variety of essentials. It's easy to navigate, too.
- **Texas fun:** We all know the Internet's best for purely personal and marginal interests, so once you're done with your trip planning, check out **www.texascooking.com** for authentic Texas cooking, including recipes and discussions of mysteries such as the Texas fruitcake subculture conspiracy.

# 2

# Texas in Depth

*by Neil Edward Schlecht*

Texas looms large, and Texans are a unique bunch, unapologetic in their swaggering embrace of the place they call home. "It's flat and dry," you say. "Yup, parts are," they reply. "It's hot," you say. "Hotter 'n hell," they confirm. "Texans talk funny," you say. "Y'all do too," they retort. Self-confident and independent almost to a fault, Texas seems to embody all that's good, bad, and especially big about the United States. The former independent Republic of Texas—which shook off the landlord claims of Spain, Mexico, France, and even the U.S.—has die-hards who still wish Texas would suck it up and secede.

Texans don't seem to mind too much if outsiders get caught up in the myths and clichés about Texas (that way they get to keep the truth to themselves). A 10-gallon hat doesn't hold 10 gallons of anything, nor is Texas flat, dry, and featureless, filled with cowboys on the range, oilmen watching their backyard gushers spit up black gold, and helmet-haired beauty queens. But it's hard to compete with the state's image, the canvas for 100 Western flicks. The big-sky frontier of Texas and the West is the quintessential American landscape, the mythic cowboy leading his longhorn cattle on long drives a heroic figure. The outlaws who thumbed their noses at authority (behind the barrel of a gun) and the boomtown gamblers who struck it rich are also part of the romantic tale of Texas.

Once a separate nation, and today bigger than England and France combined, Texas is a place that dreams big and walks tall, where the sky and ranches—and, Texans hope, the possibilities—are massive. The history of Texas is laced with events and heroes large and legendary, many of which have catapulted into state and national lore. In many ways Texas has come to symbolize the nation's westward expansion, its complicated struggle for independence, and the dearly held mystique of a land of opportunity and wide-open spaces. Texas's complex settlement pattern—the territory was claimed by Spain, France, and Mexico before becoming an independent republic and then the 28th state in the Union in 1845—supports its mythic status. "Six flags" really did famously fly over the state from the 16th to the 19th century, during which time there were eight changes of government. Even though the state has increasingly become one of immigrants from other states and other nations south of the border, Texans continue to exhibit a fiercely independent streak. The pages that follow explore the state's history and provide a primer on its unique culture.

## 1 TEXAS TODAY

The legendary cowboy still exists, but Texas is now decidedly more urban than rural. Three of the nation's 10 largest cities are here: Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. Texas today is as much a leader of high-tech industries as it is an agricultural and ranching state. There are world-class art museums and collections in

Houston, Fort Worth, and Dallas, where local philanthropists have used their money and influence to import the world's most celebrated architects to build some of the nation's most talked-about museums. Although Texas is by and large a conservative place, Austin has long supported thriving hippie and renegade musician communities, and Dallas is nipping at its heels with a thriving music scene. The state is a melting pot dotted by pockets of Czech, German, and Irish communities; bilingual populations in the lower Rio Grande Valley and border towns; and more than four million people of Hispanic descent.

This enormous state also has immense geographical diversity. Cross Texas and you'll see desert plains in the Texas Panhandle, the Piney Woods in East Texas, beaches in the Gulf Coast, North Texas prairies, scenic wildflowers and lakes in Central Texas Hill Country, desert canyons in Big Bend National Park, and the rugged Guadalupe Mountains.

Still, some of the clichés are true. Texas, the second-largest state in the United States in both landmass and population, is larger than any country in Europe. You can set out from Amarillo in your car and drive south for 15 hours and still not reach Mexico. And everything is bigger in Texas, of course: The ranches are bigger, the steaks are bigger, and the bigger and badder cars—Cadillacs with longhorns on the grille and monster pickup trucks with gun racks—really do exist. In Texas you can carry a concealed handgun—even in church—and the state is known as the capital punishment capital of the world. "Don't Mess with Texas" is more than an effective antilitter campaign.

Texans, though, are startlingly friendly and hospitable folks. Deals are still completed with handshakes, and adults say "yes, ma'am" and "nossir" to each other. Also, Texans love their sports, especially football. This is a place where entire towns pack the bleachers for Friday-night high-school games and preachers mention the game in their sermons, praying for victory in a kind of gridiron holy war.

Former Texas governor and owner of the Texas Rangers baseball team, and now former president, George W. Bush ended his two terms in office with the lowest approval ratings in modern times. Bush regularly retreated to his sprawling ranch in Crawford, Texas, outside of Waco, during his presidency, but now Bush will call Dallas home, as will his presidential library (to be built at Southern Methodist University, his wife's alma mater).

As Bush may have unwittingly illustrated, it's hard for most people to be indifferent about Texas. It's a place to romanticize and ridicule, to dream about and dismiss. Texans can leave the state, but sooner or later they'll admit their weaknesses for Texas dance halls and Old West saloons, Tex-Mex and barbecue, cowboy boots, and country music. From the big sky and flat plains and the Hill Country highways lined by Texas bluebonnets to the larger-than-life personalities like LBJ, Anne Richards, Lance Armstrong, and Willie Nelson: Texas stays with you.



## 2 LOOKING BACK AT TEXAS

**EARLY NATIVE AMERICANS** In prehistoric times, central parts of the state were once submerged under water, and about 100 million years ago, massive dinosaurs, some unique to Texas, roamed the plains. The first human occupation dates from about 10,000 b.c. Traces of a prehistoric people today referred to as Paleo-Indians have been found, though very little is known of these early hunters. Tribal groups emerged around 8000 b.c., leaving behind murals of daily life and

## Gloss'ry: How to Talk Like a Texan

It may be true that Texans talk differently, but it's tough to pin down a true Texas accent—a reality evident in virtually any Hollywood picture about the place. Most Texans don't speak with the Southern drawl of the deep South. It's more of a Western twang. And because Texas is such a big place, influenced by the language of adventurers heading west and newly arrived immigrants (Yankees from the north, Mexicans from south of the border), Texans have adopted a rich vocabulary and colorful manner of speaking.

It's not just how they say it, but what they say that makes Texans stand out. Their folksy language and homespun hyperbole seems to come effortlessly. Longtime CBS news anchor Dan Rather, a native of Wharton, Texas, was both ridiculed and celebrated for his colorful language; one election night he described a candidate who "tore through Dixie like a big wheel through a cotton field." Evocative phrases, such as "that dawg don't hunt," also spilled effortlessly from the sharp tongue of the late former Texas governor Ann Richards, who famously chided George Bush, Sr., for having been born "with a silver foot in his mouth." Another tried-and-true method of talkin' Texan is to sprinkle in Spanish words and Anglicize the Spanish names of towns and streets. Even non-Hispanic Texans liberally toss around phrases like "Hola," "Qué pasa?" and "Adiós, amigo" in their everyday patter. Keep an ear out for things like "Guada-loop" (for Guadalupe) and "Man-shack" (for Manchaca).

- **All the fixin's** Accompaniments—beans, mashed potatoes, gravy, and the like—to go with chicken-fried steak. The plate should groan under their weight.
- **Awl** Texas's largest industry. As in, awl 'n' gas.
- **Big ol'** Large; esteemed.

religious ceremonies in caves in what is now West Texas. As many as 30,000 different Native American tribes—including the Caddos, Coahuiltecans, Tonkawans, Apaches, and Comanches—occupied the land before the arrival of European settlers in the 16th century. Indians grew crops that would become modern mainstays, such as cotton, corn, beans, squash, tomatoes, and potatoes. Even the name "Texas" can be traced to Native American tribes: *Tejas* is the Spanish pronunciation of the Caddo word for "friend."

**ARRIVAL OF THE SPANIARDS** Unfortunately, the arrival of the Spaniards was hardly friendly. Many of the Native American tribes were quickly wiped out, killed by either disease or land-grabbing conquistadors. Along with opportunists in search of gold, glory, and land were missionaries in search of souls. Their objective was the Christianization of Native tribes.

The first European to reach Texas is believed to have been Alonso Alvarez de Piñeda. In 1519, the Spanish explorer made a map of the Texas coast, establishing the basis for the first claim to the land and Spanish rule. Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca landed in Galveston in 1528 in search of cities of gold, eventually finding his way to Mexico City, where he told stories of seven such cities that lay just north of where his expeditions took him. His tall tales—the first of many that

- **Buffalo chip** What cowboys kick around out in the fields— cow dung.
- **Coke** Generic term for soft drink. Dr. Pepper, Pepsi, RC Cola—they're all just "Coke" to Texans.
- **Dadgummit** and **dadburnit** Common expletives.
- **Fixin' to** A general state of preparedness or intent to carry out an act ("I'm fixin' to eat that chicken-fried steak of yours").
- **Gimme cap** Freebie baseball caps, with logos of a wl 'n' gas and other companies on the bill; redneck uniform to be worn as an alternative to cowboy hat. The name is derived from the frequent request, "Gimme one them thar caps."
- **Give a holler** A plea to call, write, or e-mail.
- **Good ol' boy** A true Texan.
- **Gussied up** The look necessary for going out; dolled up 'n' pretty.
- **Hook 'em** The cry and hand signal (index finger and pinkie raised like horns) of University of Texas graduates everywhere—as in, "Hook 'em, horns."
- **Howdy, y'all** The one-size-fits-all greeting—singular, plural, who cares? Y'all is a contraction of "you all," but is actually just Texan for "you." Howdy is pronounced "high-dee."
- **I reckon** The act of thinking out loud.
- **Kicker** Cowboy who puts his point y-toed boots to good use.
- **Over yonder** Where you'll likely be when you give a holler.
- **Yankee** A northerner; outsider; opponent of Texas statehood.
- **Yes, ma'am** The polite way to respond to any woman over 20.
- **Yessir** and **nossir** The polite way to respond to a Texan man.

would emanate from Texas—prompted fellow explorer Coronado to venture north through Texas all the way to Kansas. Of course, he never found those elusive cities of gold, the so-called Seven Cities of Cíbola, but his explorations did fortify Spain's land claims.

In 1598, Juan de Oñate formally claimed Texas for Spain, though the first permanent settlement and official mission, Corpus Christi de la Isleta (near El Paso), didn't come for another 84 years. Spain held Texas for 300 years, and its influence, perhaps filtered through its Latin American colonies, is strongly felt; in reality, though, Spain did little more than raise a few missions and settlements along the coast.

**UNDER THE FRENCH FLAG** The French claimed Texas based on a visit from Rene-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, who sailed the Mississippi River down to the Gulf of Mexico in 1682. Back in France, La Salle received a royal commission to establish a French empire in the southwestern territories of North America. When he returned in 1685, the Frenchman miscalculated and landed 400 miles west of the mouth of the Mississippi, on the Texas coast near Matagorda Bay. Undaunted, he established Fort San Louis and raised the French flag. The French

settlement lasted only a few years, victim of both disease and Indian attack (which felled the fort), and La Salle himself was killed by his own men.

Spaniards quickly responded to the French settlements in Texas and Louisiana, establishing their own mission, San Francisco de los Tejas, in East Texas in 1690. Three decades later, the Mission of San Antonio de Valero—the Alamo—led to the founding of the city of San Antonio (which became the seat of Spanish government in Texas in 1772). Spain established missions across Texas, but its colonization of the territory proceeded slowly.

**MEXICO'S TURN** Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821 and turned its sights to the immense territory north. The Mexican government granted authorization to Stephen F. Austin, who would become known as the "Father of Texas," to settle in southeast Texas with a colony of 300 families (the "Texas Original 300"). The Austin settlers weren't the first Anglo-Americans in Texas, but the new colony, made up mostly of Tennesseans, marked the official beginning of Anglo-American colonization. Just 15 years later, nearly 50,000 people had settled in Texas.

American settlers had to accept Mexican citizenship and Roman Catholicism to remain in Texas. Mexico had a republican form of government; but states' rights, including those of Texas, were not defined, and the Mexican government did little to protect its colony. As more Americans settled there, Texas took on the shape of a U.S. outpost, despite the Mexican flag flying over it. Stephen Austin organized a militia, which would become the famous Texas Rangers, to protect the colony. Tensions grew, and Mexico denied the entry of additional American settlers in 1830. Other religious, political, and cultural clashes between Texans and the Mexican government ensued, and the self-proclaimed president of Mexico, Gen. António López de Santa Anna, bolstered his troops in Texas. Texans then requested the status of independent Mexican state. When their diplomatic initiative failed, Texans declared independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836.

War was imminent. Texas forces attacked San Antonio. In response, Santa Anna and his troops vastly outnumbered and then ruthlessly crushed the valiant Texans, led by Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie, at the Alamo in a 2-week battle in March 1836. Mexican troops slaughtered more than 300 Texas prisoners at Goliad only days later, unwittingly giving rise to the battle cry of independence: "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!" (though only the first defeat is now generally remembered). Six weeks later the Texans, led by Gen. Sam Houston's army, rebounded with a stunning and decisive victory over Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto, winning their independence from Mexico on April 21, 1836.

**THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS & THE CONFEDERACY** The Lone Star flag flew triumphantly for nearly a decade, from 1836 to 1845, over the Republic of Texas, a nation that was officially recognized by the United States and Europe but not Mexico. Six different sites served as the Texas capital until the town of Austin finally won out in 1839. The government, based on the U.S. model, had a president, a senate, a house of representatives, and an army, navy, and militia. Yet the new republic faced some daunting problems, such as boundary disputes, debt, and concerns about Mexican attack. Unable to solve those by itself, the republic accepted U.S. annexation, and Texas became the 28th state in 1845, ceding some western lands (parts of modern-day Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Colorado) to the Union. Mexico terminated diplomatic relations with the United States; the Mexican War ended with Mexico's surrender to the United States in 1848 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which rejected Mexican claims on Texas and the Southwest.

### Fun Facts Texas Types

**The Wildcatter:** An independent oilman, a gambler at heart whose fortunes rise and fall with the oil and gas industry.

**The Roughneck:** A laborer who operates the oil rigs. Often itinerant or immigrant—down-and-dirty and flush with cash. A Texas sailor.

**The Maverick:** Originally denoted an unbranded calf, but came to be understood as a Texas archetype: the nonconformist, independent-thinking man (or woman!).

But there was more tumult to come. Texas joined the Confederate States of America, seceding from the United States in January 1861. Texas sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War, though support was not unanimous among leaders. Gov. Sam Houston chose to resign rather than back the Confederate states. About 90,000 Texans saw military service, and the Texas economy was left in shambles. After the end of the Civil War, Texas—after ratifying the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments—officially rejoined the Union in March 1870.

**THE WILD WEST TO TODAY** Texas was still the Wild West and most of its settlers lived the frontier life. The dismal economy after the war and abundant longhorn cattle in southern Texas led to the great Texas trail drives to northern markets in the 1860s. The drives north from Texas to Kansas City, such as the famous Chisholm Trail, brought prosperity to ranchers and particularly the city of Fort Worth, the site of cattle auctions and shipping companies, which grew as the railroads reached Texas at the end of the 19th century. The free-for-all, boomtown aspect of life in Texas became a natural haven to all sorts of opportunists and outlaws, among them Wild Bill Hickok, John Wesley Hardin, and Billy the Kid (and later, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow).

In 1901, the Texas oil and gas boom exploded with the discovery of the Spindletop oil field near Beaumont, transforming the agricultural economy and bringing riches to many other Texans. The discovery of "black gold" produced a spate of new Texas boomtowns, with an influx of workers—known as wildcatters and mavericks—hoping that a little hard work in the oil fields would translate into rapid wealth.

Texas celebrated its centennial in 1936 with the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas at Fair Park. But the next real watershed event in Texas was a tragic one. On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated as his motorcade passed through downtown Dallas. Kennedy's vice president, Texas's own Lyndon B. Johnson, was sworn in as the 36th president aboard the presidential plane at Dallas's Love Field airport.

The urban areas of Texas have continued to grow, with Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas among the 10 largest cities in the United States. These cities and fast-growing, formerly suburban communities have successfully attracted firms that have relocated their headquarters from around the country. Texas has recently become a leader in the technology industry, and the capital, Austin, has been transformed from a government and university town to one of the nation's most important clusters of high-tech corporations and computer-chip makers.

# 3 TEXAS IN POP CULTURE

**MUSIC** The role that Texas musicians have played in creating a particularly American idiom of popular music, from country to blues, jazz, and rock, is impossible to overestimate. Neither country and western nor the blues originated in Texas, but both genres of roots music have been indelibly shaped by talented Texans. The state ranks alongside Tennessee or Louisiana for contributions to the Americana music scene, and the number of individual music greats that Texas has spawned is astonishing. They've come from such big cities as Houston, Austin, and Dallas, of course, but most remarkable is how many have rolled out of Lubbock. The barren lands of West Texas have proved incredibly fertile for the creation of homespun music. Texas has spawned so many musicians that a museum honoring their contributions to pop culture is in the works, most likely to be housed in Houston.

Most listeners think of country music when they think of Texas sounds, and the state was certainly instrumental in the form's early development, a product of cowboy songs and folk contributions from new immigrants. **Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys,** who emerged from Lubbock in the 1920s, introduced Western swing (or Texas swing), a combustible mix of hillbilly tunes, fiddle music, jazz, polka, cowboy ballads, and Mexican ranchero music. Texas artists such as **George Jones** in the 1950s popularized honky-tonk, characterized by steel guitars, fiddles, and plaintive vocals. Jones, one of country's finest voices, became a balladeer and top-10 hit maker. Like **Kenny Rogers** of Conroe, Texas, he was more closely identified with Nashville than with Texas.

With characteristic independence, Texas musicians developed their own kind of country. Progressive and outlaw country fused hard-core honky-tonk, folk, rock, and blues. With country music reaching a national audience in the 1970s with the blandly orchestrated Nashville sound, a gang of Texas outlaws, led by **Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Jerry Jeff Walker** (not a native Texan but closely identified with the scene), and **Kris Kristofferson** seized the stage with a gritty, maverick rejection of the slicker country being produced in Nashville. Waylon and Willie's "Luckenbach, Texas," a song about a town with two dozen people, became a state anthem. Nelson, the braided, bandanna-wearing iconoclast of Texas country, has evolved into one of Texas's most beloved contemporary figures. He began his career as a songwriter of hits for Patsy Cline ("Crazy") and others before positioning himself as a cult artist and finally a crossover country star, daring to dabble in all genres, from traditional country and ballads ("Blue Eyes Cryin' in the Rain") to potent country poetry and even reggae. Nelson is currently as into alternative fuels (marketing a biodiesel fuel called "BioWillie," which is available in eight states, including 16 locations in Texas) as he is in exploring new musical genres.

Other Texas singer-songwriters, such as **Guy Clark** and **Townes Van Zandt,** less prone to the outlaw lifestyle but still resolutely independent, mined a territory of lyrical country-folk music. These unjustly overlooked artists laid the foundation for the current generation of Texas songwriters, including **Lyle Lovett, Jimmie Dale Gilmore,** and **Steve Earle,** musicians as at home in country as they are in rock, gospel, and the blues. Western swing has undergone a couple of rounds of revival, in the 1970s and again in the early 1990s. **Asleep at the Wheel,** a multipiece band that has gone through innumerable lineup changes, has been present for both. Current stars among Texas singer-songwriters with a touch of twang include **Nanci Griffith, Michelle Shocked,** and **Kelly Willis.**

Expanding the horizons of Texas music are Dallas-area rockabilly bar-burners **Reverend Horton Heat** and Texas polka aficionados **Brave Combo,** originally from Denton.

Texas blues began with such legendary figures as **Blind Lemmon Jefferson** (whose "Black Snake Moan" struck quite a chord in the 1920s) and **Blind Willie Johnson,** both of whom played the area around Deep Ellum in Dallas. **Robert Johnson** may have been from Mississippi, but he made his only known recordings in Dallas and San Antonio in the 1930s. **Sam "Lightning" Hawkins,** of Houston, created a blistering blues guitar style that influenced generations of rockers. Other notable Houston blues musicians include **B. B. King, Albert Collins,** and **Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown.**

Port Arthur's **Janis Joplin**'s raw vocals and blues-inflected rock (not to mention her heroin overdose and posthumous hit, "Me and Bobby McGee") made her an icon of the 1960s. **Stevie Ray Vaughan,** an incendiary guitar wizard from south Dallas, also became a blues-rock star before his light went out prematurely in a helicopter crash in 1990. Austin club regulars **Angela Strehli, Lou Ann Barton,** and **Toni Price** continue the Texas blues tradition.

Texas has produced its share of rock-'n'-roll pioneers, too. Lubbock's **Buddy Holly,** the bespectacled proto-rocker who with his band, the Crickets, influenced Elvis, the Beatles, and countless new-wavers with tunes like "Peggy Sue" and "That'll Be the Day," went down in a 1959 plane crash after just a couple of years at the top. **Roy Orbison,** from Vernon, Texas, began his career in rockabilly, but his high, haunting voice propelled a number of memorable mainstream hits in the 1960s, like "Only the Lonely" and "In Dreams." **ZZ Top,** from Houston, started out in swaggering blues-rock territory, singing about "Tush" and "LaGrange" before their belly-length beards and songs like "Legs" and "Tube Steak Boogie" made them MTV darlings. Current Texas faves on the alternative scene include the intellectual pop of **Spoon** (from Austin); the dusty, Neil Young–like **Centro-Matic** (Denton); the trippy, post-rock instrumentalists **Explosions in the Sky** (Midland), whose music is the soundtrack to the football-oriented TV show *Friday Night Lights* and the epic film *Australia;* and the costumed, unwieldy collective **The Polyphonic Spree** (Dallas).

With its Latino roots and large Hispanic population, Texas has given rise to yet another genre that reflects cross-cultural fertilization, Tex-Mex border sounds. Conjunto, *norteña,* and Tejano are all slightly different takes on this definitive Tex-Mex style, anchored by the accordion and 12-string Mexican guitar. The megastar **Selena** (Corpus Christi) brought Tejano to national Latino audiences before her death (she was murdered by the founder of her fan club), and reached a wider audience through films and books about her life. **Flaco Jiménez** is the leading conjunto proponent today. Another cross-cultural musical phenomenon in Texas is zydeco, a Creole stew that combines Afro-Caribbean, blues, and Cajun rhythms, and is especially popular in the Houston and Galveston areas (as well as Louisiana). **Los Lonely Boys,** three Mexican-American brothers from San Angelo, had a huge hit in 2004 with "Heaven" and their radio-friendly brand of Latino-tinged blues pop, which some have labeled "Texican."

In large part, Texas has proved such fecund musical ground because of its strong tradition of live performance. For a couple of decades now, Austin has immodestly declared itself the "Live Music Capital of the World," and its rollicking clubs have presented nightly diverse lineups of homegrown and imported live music acts. From Armadillo World Headquarters to

Club Foot and Liberty Lunch, Austin has embraced a disproportionate share of legendary, beloved, and now-defunct live music venues. **Gilley's** and **Billy Bob's,** two huge, slick honky-tonks still going strong in Houston and Fort Worth, are important national showcases for traditional country and redneck rock bands, while classic small-town Texas dance halls such as **Gruene Hall** (in Gruene, pronounced "green," located south of Austin, smack in the middle of New Braunfels) keep the flame burning. Dancing to country music is a true Texas art, and while the popularity of individual dances—the Two-Step, Cotton-Eyed Joe, and line dancing (a kind of kickers' aerobics)—rises and falls with the latest hits, in Texas they have amazing staying power. The dance floors of local honky-tonks pack in young Billy Ray Cyrus look-alikes and single rodeo queens in tight jeans as well as nimble older folks boot-scootin' like there's no tomorrow.

For rock and alternative music lovers, two of the biggest music festivals in the country are held annually in Austin: South by Southwest (SXSW), in March, and the outdoors Austin City Limits Festival (cruelly held in Sept, at the tail end of the brutal Central Texas summer).

**FILM** Texas—with its larger-than-life characters and mythic representation of the Southwest—has featured very prominently in film, both popular blockbusters and serious art films. Foremost among them, of course, were Westerns starring John Wayne, many of which were placed in Texas, including *The Alamo, Red River,* and *Three Texas Steers.* John Ford's 1956 *The Searchers*—also starring Wayne—is generally considered one of the greatest Westerns ever filmed. *Giant* (also from 1956) is expansive like Texas itself, set on a massive ranch location under a huge sky with Rock Hudson as a ranch bar on who wins over Elizabeth Taylor. In 1969's *Easy Rider,* Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper take a motorcycle road trip through Texas and meet up with Jack Nicholson. More recent, mainstream movies include *Terms of Endearment,* an Oscar winner based on Larry McMurtry's book, set in Houston and starring Jack Nicholson (as a former astronaut), Debra Winger, and Shirley MacLaine; *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas,* with Dolly Parton as a madam running the Chicken Ranch (which sold neither chickens nor eggs) in a small Texas town; *Urban Cowboy,* more or less Saturday Night Fever relocated from NYC to Houston's honky-tonks, complete with John Travolta in a 10-gallon hat; and the football-themed *Friday Night Lights,* based on the book by H. G. Bissinger. The art film category is well represented by *No Country for Old Men,* the Oscar-winning Coen Brothers film based on the violent Cormac McCarthy novel of the same name; *The Last Picture Show,* Peter Bogdanovich's film (based on another McMurtry novel) about high-school seniors in Anarene, a nowheresville Texas town; *Tender Mercies,* Bruce Bereford's 1983 movie starring Robert Duvall as a drifter and former country singer who finds redemption in the hands of a widow on the Texas plains; *Paris, Texas,* about another Texas drifter (played by Harry Dean Stanton), though this time made by a German, Wim Wenders; and *Days of Heaven,* by the Texan Terrence Malick, about a steel worker who flees to the wheat fields of Texas and finds conflict and tragedy when confronted by a wealthy landowner. If that's all too bleak and grown-up, how about *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* or Richard Linklater's homages to Austin, *Slacker* and *Dazed and Confused?*

Movies are increasingly being filmed in Texas. Austin has emerged as the "Third Coast" alternative to Los Angeles and New York City as a filmmaker's haven. Texas filmmakers include legendary director Terrence Malick *(The Thin Red Line, Days of Heaven, Badlands, The New World)* and young moviemakers creating an Austin

school of sorts: Richard Linklater *(Before Sunrise, School of Rock, Fast Food Nation)* and Robert Rodriguez *(El Mariachi, Spy Kids).* Several well-known actors make their homes in Austin, too, including Matthew McConaughey and Sandra Bullock.

**TV** Surely the most famous television series set in Texas was the long-running nighttime soap *Dallas,* which gave rise to the national mantra "Who shot J.R.?" and made people across the globe believe that Texans had oil rigs in their backyards. *Lonesome Dove,* based on the novel by Texan Larry McMurtry, was a hugely successful miniseries in 1989, featuring Robert Duvall and Tommy Lee Jones and filmed at several Texas ranches. *Walker, Texas Ranger* starred Chuck Norris in a Western police drama, with plenty of martial arts and a partner who was a former Dallas Cowboy. More recently, the critically acclaimed series adapted from the book and film of the same name, *Friday Night Lights,* beautifully explored a small West Texas town where the weekly ritual, the high school 's football games, are an obsession (the show is shot in Austin). *King of the Hill,* an animated series from Mike Judge, an Austinite by way of Garland, is set in the fictional small Texas town of Arlen. PBS's *Austin City Limits* is a legendary, long-running, live-music program featuring diverse artists from all over the country and globe.

**BOOKS** Fans of James Michener will appreciate his historical novel *Texas.* Although wordy and a bit tedious, Michener was an excellent storyteller as well as historian, and his book (exhaustively) brings the state and its people to life. (It's a big state, but couldn 't he have done it in fewer than 1,344 pages?) Two authors who share a "Mc" in their surnames dominate the subject of contemporary fiction set in Texas: Larry McMurtry and Cormac McCarthy. These two writers are much more than an introduction to both the real and mythical Texas. The contributions of McMurtry (born in Wichita Falls, and educated at Northorth Texas State and Rice universities) to the Texas canon are many. *Lonesome Dove* (1985) won the Pultizer Prize for its depiction of ex–Texas Rangers on a cattle drive. Other significant works by McMurtry about or set in Texas, many delving into the lives of cowboys and ranchers, include *Leaving Cheyenne; Terms of Endearment; The Last Picture Show; Horseman, Pass By; In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas;* and *All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers.* Cormac McCarthy, who is not a Texan, is also a Pulitzer Prize winner; his works of the past 25 years have been some of the best-received in American literature. The Western and Southern Gothic themes, and depiction of brutal violence, hone in on weighty matters of life and death, and McCarthy is frequently compared to William Faulkner. His masterworks are *Blood Meridian* (concerning the 19th-c. travels of "the kid," largely in Texas, and often cited as one of the greatest American novels of the 20th c.) and *All the Pretty Horses* (about a young cowboy and his friend from West Texas who venture to Mexico). McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* is also set in southwestern Texas, along the Mexico border. Annie Proulx's *That Old Ace in the Hole* is set in the Panhandle. Texas author Sandra Cisneros's short stories, such as *Women Hollering Cree,* are powerful and critically acclaimed. *The Gates of the Alamo,* by Stephen Harrigan, is a gripping, fictionalized version of Texas's most famous battle. Among fiction and nonfiction with somewhat more mass appeal are *Friday Night Lights,* for many readers one of the finest sports books written, chronicling the football obsession of a small West Texas town; and *Semi-Tough,* a novel by Dan Jenkins about two Fort Worth football studs, one of the funniest. Jenkins's *Baja Oklahoma* offers a funny, poignant, and somewhat raunchy look at what we might call classic modern Texans, at least the Fort Worth trailer-trash variety.

Even readers who don't cook will enjoy *The Only Texas Cookbook,* by Linda West Eckhardt. Interspersed among its 300 recipes—including classics such as Fuzzy's Fantastic South Texas Road Meat Chili and Bad Hombre Eggs—are numerous humorous anecdotes on food-related subjects. Those who savor biting political humor—and don't mind seeing every Texas Republican mercilessly skewered—will thoroughly enjoy any book of essays by the late newspaper columnist Molly Ivins, who is credited with bestowing the nickname "Dubya" on George W. Bush.

**FAMOUS TEXANS** You may already know that outsize personalities such as outlaws Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, rock stars Buddy Holly and Janis Joplin, and former president Lyndon B. Johnson hail from Texas. But there are plenty of other famous folk with Texan roots, some of whom might surprise you.

**Lance Armstrong** (Plano). Heroic cycling champion—record-holding all-time champion of the Tour de France—and inspirational survivor of testicular cancer. Wore a Texas Lone Star on his helmet and one of those ubiquitous "LIVESTRONG" yellow bracelets on his wrist. He lives in Austin.

**Gene Autry** (Tioga). A singin' cowboy and A-list film star who made it big with "The Yellow Rose of Texas" in the 1930s.

**George W. Bush** (Midland). He wasn't born on the prairies of Texas (rather, in blue-state Connecticut), but the former governor clings hard to his Texas heritage, with a ranch in Crawford, outside Waco. He grew up in the midst of the oil business, tried his hand at that, failed, and then owned the Texas Rangers baseball team before becoming governor of Texas and then president of the United States. His core of closest advisors, including Karl Rove and Karen Hughes, were also Texans.

**Joan Crawford** (San Antonio). Hollywood's Mommie Dearest, from deep in the heart of Texas.

**Michael Dell** (Austin). This Houston-born whiz kid and billionaire (he's the ninth-richest American) started Dell Computer Corporation, which today is one of the largest tech companies in the world, in his dorm room at UT in Austin. Though he dropped out of UT, Dell later gave the university $50 million.

**Farrah Fawcett** (Corpus Christi). 1970s bathing suit pinup, Charlie's hottest angel—the woman who created the wings hairstyle—and UT grad.

**Phyllis George** (Denton). Former Miss America, former morning show host, and former wife of a Kentucky governor.

**Howard Hughes** (Houston). Eccentric billionaire industrialist as famous for his reclusive and weirdo tendencies as his moneymaking prowess, which included planes, movies, and tools.

**Steve Martin** (Waco). Wild-and-crazy comedian turned occasionally serious author *(Shopgirl)* and art collector.

**Meat Loaf** (Houston). Monster of a man with a big voice who recorded "Bat Out of Hell." He later slimmed down, cut his stringy locks, and translated his music video experience into an acting career (in *The Rocky Picture Horror Show* and B-grade action films).

**Bill Moyers** (Marshall). From student of religion to LBJ press secretary to soft-spoken but contentious PBS journalist investigating such weighty matters as philosophy, ironmen, and dying.

**Madalyn Murray O'Hair** (Austin). Strident atheist who r oared tir elessly to separate chur ch fr om all things state.

**Roy O rbison** ( Wink). The man with the gr owl in his classic '60s song "Pr etty Woman." D ark specs, amazing angelic v oice, and ev en more amazing hair.

**Dan R ather** ( Wharton). S erious newsman who made anchorman, with a penchant for odd signatur e sign-offs, do wn-home aphorisms, and bizarre episodes in his personal life. (" What's the fr equency, K enneth?")

**Ginger Rogers** (Fort Worth). Fred's favorite dance par tner hailed fr om Cowtown; I bet she did a mean two-step. Nee Virginia McMath.

**Jaclyn S mith** (H ouston). Another Charlie's Angel, and Kmar t spokesperson.

**Liz S mith** (F ort Worth). G ossip queen and columnist.

**Sissy S pacek** (Q uitman). S ometimes brilliant actr ess who w ent from *Badlands* to a *Coal M iner's Daughter* to *Missing.*

**Lee Trevino** (D allas). P ro golfer—and serious riv al of N icklaus and Palmer—whose folksy language and links style made Tex-Mex cool in the mid-'70s.

**Van Clibur n** (Kilgor e). A ccomplished pianist (winner of Tchaikovsky competition in 1958) and namesake of international piano competition held annually in F ort Worth's Bass Performance Hall.

**TEXAN ST YLE** S ome Yankees and coastal snob types might be inclined to think that " Texan style" is an o xymoron. And it's tr ue, Texans ar e pr obably better known as world-class shoppers than arbiters of taste. B ut style? Texans have plenty of their o wn. B eyond oil, championship sports teams, and r oots music, Texas's greatest export is the classic Western cowboy style that the state seems to embody . Everybody from Ralph Lauren to Madonna seems to have adopted cowboy duds as the very symbol of American cool and r ugged independence. O utsiders may not pull it off with as much natural ease as Texans, but the basics of co wboy style ar en't hard to master.

There's the fundamental **ranch-hand style,** which depends on clothes tough enough to withstand the demands of life on the range: long, snug-fitting boot-cut jeans (pr eferably Wrangler or Lee) that bunch up at the bottom, worn with a belt featuring a big ol' buckle, scuffed-up calfskin co wboy boots, crisp Western shir t, and a cowboy hat (straw in summer, felt in winter). Taking the basic elements, y ou can gussy up the look as much as y ou wish. The **drugstore co wboy** or **rodeo queen** look adopts fun and fancy embellishments such as embr oidered y okes and sterling silv er collar tips. **Urban cowboys** in oil and banking simply thr ow mor e money at the basics, and don boots and hats with their pinstripes for business (and ranch-style gabar dine twill pants in place of jeans on the weekends). The boots aren't made of regular old calfskin leather, but of such exotic skin as alligator, ostrich, or eel, preferably handmade and with elaborate uppers. The hat will be a top-of-the-line number fr om a classic Western outfitter such as M. L. Leddy's in Fort Worth. The belt buckle (along with the tip and keeper) is sterling silver.

For a certain kind of woman in Texas—the kind that will w ear a Western shir t only if it is expensiv ely studded with rhinestones and r ubies—the classic look has long been the one cr eated by upscale Dallas and Houston shopping mavens: big salon-coifed and frosted hair, a wide pearly smile, and an o verly pr ecious designer outfit, accented by a cornucopia of fur and jewelry. The Robert Altman film *Dr. T &*

*the Women* got the Dallas upper-class look of professional shoppers down to a T.

**BOOTS** Cowboy boots date from the riding boots the Spanish conquistadors and vaqueros wore. They're the most fundamental element of the cowboy look, and almost everyone in Texas owns at least one pair. Real cowboys have everyday boots and dress-up or dance-floor boots. The basics are plain old black or brown calfskin boots, with either a roper (low heel) or a riding or semiwalking (high heel) style. The toes can be pointed, squared off, or gently rounded. The sharp pointed toe is the most authentic, though today many younger ropers go with the rounded style. The tops, which are generally calf-high, can be either V-shaped or straight, but should always have stitched-on pull straps. Boot stores stock a bewildering array of leathers: Besides basic (but smooth, rugged, and inexpensive) calfskin, you'll find showy and more delicate (and often vastly more expensive) exotic skins, such as lizard, eel, alligator, ostrich, snake, stingray, water buffalo, and kangaroo. Generally the most expensive boots a shop will stock are horned-toe crocodile; a pair of those babies will set you back a couple of grand. Boot design can be no-nonsense or elaborately styled, with contrasting uppers, fancy stitching, and piping.

Even more important than look, though, is fit: A boot has to fit properly. It should be snug, requiring you to pull on with both straps and yank off with a touch of difficulty, but not tight. Your heel should snap into place but allow for a little movement. A good boot seller can help you determine the right fit. Don't buy unless you're sure. Texas brands to look for include Lucchese, Nocona, Justin, and Tony Lama.

**HATS** Cowboy hats are serious business. They're worn at all times and not taken off indoors; if you don't think so, check out a Western dance hall on a Friday night, where you'll find cowboys twirling about the dance floor with their best hats firmly in place. The classic Stetson, like the one LBJ wore on the ranch, dates from the 1850s. A cowboy's proper "beaver" dress hat can run $1,000 or more. The key to your new hat is getting it formed, or creased, for that perfect range or courthouse look. A real-life roper retires his white straw hat at the end of summer, opting for a sturdy felt sombrero for autumn and winter—a seasonal fashion dictum not unlike the one that demands that New Englanders banish white from their wardrobes after Labor Day.

**WESTERN SHIRTS** Most traditional and urban cowboys go for heavy, pressed-cotton Western shirts in plaids or solids. Fancy Western swing shirts with pearl snaps, contrasting yokes, and little "smile" or "arrow" pockets aren't that easy to find these days. If you want a singing cowboy or fancy honky-tonk shirt, you'll need to either go vintage or shell out big bucks for a high-end designer, such as Manuel of Hollywood (who dresses Dolly Parton and other flashy country-music stars). At its most basic, though, the Western shirt should have a reinforced Western yoke, flap pockets, a full cut, and snapped cuffs. The shirttail is always worn tucked in.

**ACCESSORIES** The most important Western accessories are belt buckles, belts, hatbands, bolo ties, and bandannas. For Texan males, hand-tooled belts (often with the wearer's name embossed), hatbands, and especially buckles—which range from obscenely large Texas state seals, oil derricks, and Jack Daniel's emblems to simple, elegant silver buckles, tips, and keepers—allow him to express himself. A real Texan never buys a leather belt that comes stock with a buckle. Bolo ties, though still worn in some parts, are a little passé for the average Joe trying to adopt the cowboy look.

# 4 EATING & DRINKING IN TEXAS

Texans are famous for their love of artery-clogging steaks the size of Volkswagens. Amarillo's Big Texan Steak Ranch restaurant features a 72-ouncer (eat it in under an hour and get it free). Locals are rabidly fond of **chicken-fried steak.** This oddity is a thick slab of inexpensive beef beaten until tender and dipped in batter, deep-fried like chicken, buried under a puddle of cream gravy, doused with pepper, and served with a glob of mashed potatoes (skins on). Home-style veggies such as okra and black-eyed peas are also worthy accompaniments. A good chicken-fried steak—crisp, light, and tender—is weirdly enjoyable, but an inferior one can be like gnawing on an old tire. Note to Yankees who don't want to get laughed out of town: Don't specify "medium" or "medium rare" when ordering a chicken-fried steak. It comes only one way: cooked.

But steak—whether broiled or chicken-fried—is only part of the story. The real holy trinity of Texas eats consists of three down-home staples no true Texan can do without for long: chili, barbecue, and Tex-Mex.

**CHILI** A bowl of Texas red, hot, or hotter than hell is often thought of as Mexican or Tex-Mex. But it's as Texan as they come, with its origins in San Antonio in the late 1800s. Chili (not chile, which is Spanish for pepper) should be thick, meaty, and spicy, and served unadorned. Real Texas chili is made with beef (or occasionally rabbit or venison) but not beans. This standard has been relaxed, though, and plenty of Texans like pinto beans (never kidney beans) in their chili. There are annual chili cook-offs across the state; the most famous is held in the border town of Terlingua. Degrees of fire are usually designated as one-, two-, or three-alarm or indicated by an X, XX, or XXX. Four Xs means that the bowl of devil's soup is guaranteed to scorch your tongue, lips, and entire digestive tract.

Weird food item: **Frito pie,** which is meaty chili, cheese, and diced onions poured over a plate of (or into a bag of) Frito's corn chips. Frito pie is a staple in Texas school cafeterias (or at least it was when I was growing up).

**BARBECUE (BBQ)** Vying with chili and chicken-fried steak for the honor of state dish is barbecue (though Texans didn't invent it; the word comes from the Spanish, *barbacoa,* and the style originated in Spain and evolved in the Caribbean and Latin America). Still, the art of roasting meats over an open fire distinguishes Texans from, say, lesser humans. Texans slow-cook (smoke) beef brisket and ribs (and, to a lesser extent, pork, chicken, turkey, sausage, and *cabrito,* young goat) in pits over mesquite or hickory wood. The slow roasting and wood give it its unique, revered flavor. Texas barbecue, unlike its worthy regional competitors in such places as Memphis and the Carolinas, is almost wholly focused on beef, and it tends to be tangier and spicier than the sweeter pork popular in those places. A plate of brisket or ribs is served with heaps of tangy barbecue sauce (which is often also employed as a basting sauce), and side dishes such as potato salad, pinto beans, and coleslaw. A proper Texas barbecue will be either a down-and-dirty, ramshackle joint such as Sonny Bryan's in Dallas and Angelo's in Fort Worth, or a rustic place in the country with long picnic tables and a huge barbecue pit in full view, such as the Salt Lick in Driftwood, outside of Austin.

**TEX-MEX** Neither identifiably Mexican nor strictly Texan, Tex-Mex is, as the name indicates, a hybrid menu of simple dishes. A Texan gets homesick for authentic Tex-Mex cooking just as fast as she does for barbecue or chili. No Texan has ever had

good Tex-Mex except in Texas; both barbecue and chili seem a bit easier to reproduce over state lines. Not spicy or intricate like authentic Mexican food, Tex-Mex is greasy, filling, tasty, and cheap, a step above addictive junk food. There is little distinction between dishes and ingredients. Almost all involve corn or flour tortillas, lots of white and yellow cheese, chili, hot sauce, and rice and refried beans—meaning that a good plate of Tex-Mex will lack for color. It will be essentially a uniformly muddy yellow-brown hue. Tex-Mex dishes can be spiced up with Tabasco sauce or scorcher jalapeño peppers, which young Texans learn to gobble up like pickles.

All Tex-Mex meals begin with tortilla chips and salsa (hot sauce) and guacamole for dipping. Enchiladas, chiles rellenos, *tacos al carbón,* and burritos have long been the standard-bearers for Tex-Mex, but in the past couple of decades **fajitas,** grilled beef or skirt steak rolled in flour tortillas and dolled up with guacamole, pico de gallo, and cilantro, have become the most popular dish. Less than authentic, but wildly popular, is the substitution of strips of barbecued chicken breast for beef.

**BEVERAGES** Texans wash down chili and barbecue with plastic glasses of **ice tea** (it's the rare Texan who says *iced* tea) the size of small oil drums, and **Texas beer,** preferably longnecks of Lone Star, Pearl, and Shiner Bock, drunk straight from the bottle. Beverage choices shift slightly in Tex-Mex restaurants. While pitchers of ice tea are fine, the beer should be ice-cold ***cerveza,*** Mexican beer such as Corona, Tecate, Dos Equis, or Bohemia, usually served with a wedge of lime squeezed into the bottle or can. And the number-one libation for washing down a plate of Tex-Mex is the **margarita,** a tart concoction of tequila, lime juice, and triple sec, either served on the rocks or frozen. Most margaritas use cheap well tequila, but connoisseurs opt for "top-shelf" margaritas (served on the rocks), made with 100% blue agave tequilas. And the connoisseurs of connoisseurs drink aged tequilas—called *reposado* or *añejo*—straight, followed by a "tequila chaser," like the one served at Javier's restaurant in Dallas: a shot glass of orange juice, lemon juice, V8, pepper, salt, and Tabasco.

Texas also has a surprisingly robust roster of **wineries,** many in the Central Texas Hill Country around Fredericksburg and the High Plains near Lubbock. Llano Estacado and Pheasant Ridge are national award winners.

3

# Planning Your Trip to Texas

*by Neil Edward Schlecht*

As everyone knows, Texas is big—really big. For travelers there isn't just a lot of ground to cover, but a vast number of things to do and places to see, as well as varieties of climate, terrain, and even cultures. Depending on where you go, you can experience an Old West adventure, a relaxing (or rowdy) trip to the beach, some of America's finest museums, first-class shopping and dining, a rugged and remote national park, or homegrown live music. This chapter helps you get started.

## 1 VISITOR INFORMATION

Contact the **Texas Department of Transportation,** Travel Division, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009 (✆ **800/888-8TEX** [888-8839]; www.traveltex.com), for a free copy of the official state vacation guide, which includes a state map and describes attractions, activities, and lodgings throughout Texas. The Texas Department of Transportation also publishes the *Texas Accommodations Guide,* which is usually sent along with the official state vacation guide, or can be ordered separately at ✆ **800/452-9292.**

The nonprofit **Historic Accommodations of Texas** (✆ **800/428-0368;** www.hat.org) offers a free directory describing well over 100 member bed-and-breakfasts, country inns, unique hotels, and guesthouses. You can also get lodging information from the **Texas Hotel & Motel Association** (✆ **512/474-2996;** www.texaslodging.com).

The Texas Department of Transportation maintains a dozen excellent **Texas Travel Information Centers** around the state, offering free maps, brochures, and one-on-one travel counseling. Locations are as follows: **Amarillo,** I-40 East; **Anthony,** I-10 at the New Mexico state line; **Austin,** 112 E. 11th St., at the Capitol complex; **Denison,** U.S. 75 at the Oklahoma state line; **Gainesville,** I-35 at the Oklahoma state line; **Harlingen,** U.S. 77 at U.S. 83; **Langtry,** off U.S. 90 on Tex. Loop 25; **Laredo,** I-35 North at U.S. 83; **Orange,** I-10 at the Louisiana state line; **Texarkana,** I-30 at the Arkansas state line; **Waskom,** I-20 at the Louisiana state line; and **Wichita Falls,** I-44 at U.S. 277/281. The centers are open daily from 8am to 5pm except on January 1, Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving Day, and December 24 and 25. For information, call ✆ **800/452-9292.**

## 2 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS & CUSTOMS

### PASSPORTS

New regulations issued by the Department of Homeland Security now require virtually every traveler entering the U.S.—by air, land, or sea—to show a passport. For information on how to obtain a passport,

## Cut to the Front of the Airport Security Line as a Registered Traveler

In 2003, the **Transportation Security Administration** (**TSA;** www.tsa.gov) approved a pilot program to help ease the time spent in line for airport security screenings. In exchange for information and a fee, persons can be prescreened as registered travelers, granting them a front-of-the-line position when they fly. The program is run through private firms—the largest and most well-known is Steven Brill's **Clear** (www.flyclear.com), and it works like this: Travelers complete an online application providing specific points of personal information including name, addresses for the previous five years, birth date, Social Security number, driver's license number, and a valid credit card (you're not charged the **$99 fee** until your application is approved). Print the completed form and take it, along with proper ID, to an "enrollment station" (found in more than 20 participating airports and in a growing number of American Express offices around the country, for example). It's at this point where it gets seemingly sci-fi. At the enrollment station, a Clear representative records your biometrics necessary for clearance; in this case, your fingerprints and your irises are digitally recorded.

Once your application has been screened against no-fly lists, outstanding warrants, and other security measures, you'll be issued a clear plastic card that holds a chip containing your information. Each time you fly through participating airports (and the numbers are steadily growing), go to the Clear Pass station located next to the standard TSA screening line. Here you'll insert your card into a slot and place your finger on a scanner to read your print—when the information matches up, you're cleared to cut to the front of the security line. You'll still have to follow all the procedures of the day like removing your shoes and walking through the X-ray machine, but Clear promises to cut 30 minutes off your wait time at the airport.

On a personal note: Each time I use my Clear Pass, my travel companions are still waiting to go through security while I'm already sitting down, reading the paper, and sipping my overpriced smoothie. Granted, registered traveler programs are not for the infrequent traveler, but for those of us who fly on a regular basis, it's a perk I'm willing to pay for.

—David A. Lytle

see "Passports" in this book's appendix. For an up-to-date, country-by-country listing of passport requirements around the world, go to the "Foreign Entry Requirement" Web page of the U.S. Department of State at **http://travel.state.gov**. International visitors can obtain a visa application at the same website.

### Visas

The U.S. State Department has a **Visa Waiver Program (VWP)** allowing citizens of the following countries to enter the United States without a visa for stays of up to 90 days: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France,

Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. (***Note:*** This list was accurate at press time; for the most up-to-date list of countries in the VWP, consult www.travel.state.gov/visa.) Canadian citizens may enter the United States without visas; they will need to show passports, however. ***Note:*** Any passport issued on or after October 26, 2006, by a VWP country must be an **e-Passport** for VWP travelers to be eligible to enter the U.S. without a visa. Citizens of these nations also need to present a round-trip air or cruise ticket upon arrival. E-Passports contain computer chips capable of storing biometric information, such as the required digital photograph of the holder. (You can identify an e-Passport by the symbol on the bottom center cover of your passport.) If your passport doesn't have this feature, you can still travel without a visa if it is a valid passport issued before October 26, 2005, and includes a machine-readable zone, or between October 26, 2005, and October 25, 2006, and includes a digital photograph. For more information, go to **www.travel.state.gov/visa**.

Citizens of all other countries must have (1) a valid passport that expires at least 6 months later than the scheduled end of their visit to the U.S., and (2) a tourist visa, which may be obtained without charge from any U.S. consulate.

Many international visitors traveling on visas to the U.S. will be photographed and fingerprinted on arrival at Customs in airports and on cruise ships in a program created by the Department of Homeland Security called **US-VISIT.** Exempt from the extra scrutiny are visitors entering by land or those (mostly in Europe; see above) that don't require a visa for short-term visits. For more information, go to the Homeland Security website at **www.dhs.gov/dhspublic**.

For specifics on how to get a visa, see "Visas" in this book's appendix.

### Medical Requirements

Unless you're arriving from an area known to be suffering from an epidemic (particularly cholera or yellow fever), inoculations or vaccinations are not required for entry into the United States.

## CUSTOMS

### What You Can Bring into the U.S.

Every visitor 21 years of age and older may bring in, free of duty, the following: (1) 1 liter of wine or hard liquor; (2) 200 cigarettes, 100 cigars (but not from Cuba), or 3 pounds of smoking tobacco; and (3) $100 worth of gifts. These exemptions are offered to travelers who spend at least 72 hours in the United States and who have not claimed them within the preceding 6 months. It is forbidden to bring into the country almost any meat products (including canned, fresh, and dried meat products such as bouillon, soup mixes, and such). Generally, condiments including vinegars, oils, spices, coffee, tea, and some cheeses and baked goods are permitted. Avoid rice products, as rice can often harbor insects. Bringing fruits and vegetables is not advised, though not prohibited. Customs will allow produce depending on where you got it and where you're going after you arrive in the U.S. Foreign tourists may carry in or out up to $10,000 in U.S. or foreign currency with no formalities; larger sums must be declared to U.S. Customs on entering or leaving, which includes filing form CM 4790. For details regarding U.S. Customs and Border Protection, consult your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or **U.S. Customs** (www.cbp.gov).

### What You Can Take Home from Texas

**Canadian Citizens:** For a clear summary of Canadian rules, write for the booklet *I Declare,* issued by the Canada Border

Services Agency ( ✆ **800/461-9999** in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca).

**U.K. Citizens:** For information, contact **HM Customs & Excise** at ✆ **0845/010-9000** (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at **www.hmce.gov.uk**.

**Australian Citizens:** A helpful brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go.* For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ✆ **1300/363-263,** or log on to **www.customs.gov.au**.

**New Zealand Citizens:** Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4.* For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs,** The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (✆ **04/473-6099** or 0800/428-786; **www.customs.govt.nz**).

## 3 WHEN TO GO

As would be expected in a state as big as Texas, climate varies, sometimes dramatically, by location; it can be snowing in one area of the state, such as Amarillo, while people are swimming at South Padre Island. High temperatures in the summer average in the 90s (30s Celsius) in most of the state, while average winter temperatures drop—sometimes much lower than you might expect—as you travel northth. Southern Texas is known for its muggy summers, which make it feel hotter than it really is, and contrasts with the dryness of the West Texas deserts. The state's few mountainous areas have more extremes of temperatures, hitting the 80s and 90s (upper 20s and 30s Celsius) during the day, only to plummet into the 30s and 40s

**Average Monthly High/Low Temperatures & Precipitation**

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dallas** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Temp. (°F) | 54/33 | 59/37 | 68/46 | 76/55 | 83/63 | 92/70 | 97/74 | 96/74 | 88/67 | 79/56 | 67/45 | 58/36 |
| Temp. (°C) | 12/1 | 15/3 | 20/8 | 24/13 | 28/17 | 33/21 | 36/23 | 36/23 | 31/19 | 26/13 | 19/7 | 14/2 |
| Precip. (in.) | 1.6 | 1.9 | 2.4 | 3.1 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 2.0 | 1.5 |
| **Houston** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Temp. (°F) | 62/43 | 65/45 | 75/53 | 79/61 | 85/67 | 90/73 | 92/75 | 92/75 | 88/71 | 81/61 | 72/53 | 65/45 |
| Temp. (°C) | 17/6 | 18/7 | 24/12 | 26/16 | 29/19 | 32/23 | 33/24 | 33/24 | 31/22 | 27/16 | 22/12 | 18/7 |
| Precip. (in.) | 3.2 | 2.8 | 2.4 | 2.5 | 4.4 | 5.3 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 4.9 | 3.4 | 3.6 | 3.0 |
| **San Antonio** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Temp. (°F) | 61/38 | 66/41 | 74/50 | 80/58 | 85/66 | 92/73 | 95/75 | 95/74 | 89/69 | 82/59 | 72/49 | 63/41 |
| Temp. (°C) | 16/3 | 19/5 | 23/10 | 27/14 | 29/19 | 33/23 | 35/24 | 35/23 | 32/21 | 28/15 | 22/9 | 17/5 |
| Precip. (in.) | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.2 | 2.0 | 3.5 | 3.0 | 1.2 | 1.8 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 2.3 | 1.0 |
| **Corpus Christi** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Temp. (°F) | 65/45 | 69/48 | 76/55 | 82/63 | 86/69 | 90/73 | 93/75 | 93/75 | 90/72 | 84/64 | 76/56 | 68/48 |
| Temp. (°C) | 18/7 | 21/9 | 24/13 | 28/17 | 30/21 | 32/23 | 34/24 | 34/24 | 32/22 | 29/18 | 24/13 | 20/9 |
| Precip. (in.) | 1.7 | 2.0 | 0.9 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 3.4 | 2.4 | 3.3 | 5.5 | 3.0 | 1.6 | 1.3 |
| **Amarillo** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Temp. (°F) | 49/21 | 53/26 | 62/33 | 72/43 | 79/52 | 88/61 | 92/66 | 89/64 | 82/56 | 73/45 | 60/32 | 50/24 |
| Temp. (°C) | 9/–6 | 12/–3 | 17/1 | 22/6 | 26/11 | 31/16 | 33/19 | 32/18 | 28/13 | 23/7 | 16/0 | 10/–4 |
| Precip. (in.) | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0.7 | 0.8 | 2.2 | 3.2 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 1.7 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 0.3 |

(single digits Celsius) at night. All areas of Texas get more sunshine than most other parts of the United States.

The beaches along the Gulf Coast are busiest in winter, but are seldom really crowded. But unless you're a college kid looking for some rowdy spring-break action, you should avoid all resort areas, including the beaches and national parks, during March and early April.

For an exhaustive list of events beyond those listed here, you can find a searchable, up-to-the-minute roster of what's happening in cities all over the world at http://events.frommers.com.

## TEXAS CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### January

**AT&T Cotton Bowl Classic (& Parade),** Dallas. The annual college football bowl game, somewhat less prestigious than it once was, but still important in pigskin circles. Call ✆ **214/634-7525.** January 1.

**River Walk Mud Festival,** San Antonio. Each year, the horseshoe bend of the San Antonio River Walk is drained for maintenance, and San Antonians cheer up by electing a king and queen to reign over such events as Mud Stunts Day and the Mud Pie Ball. Call ✆ **210/227-4262.** Mid-January.

**Super Bull,** Amarillo. Don't come expecting football—this is a bull-riding event at the Amarillo Civic Center. Call ✆ **800/692-1338** or 806/376-7767. Mid-January.

**Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show and Rodeo,** Fort Worth. Fort Worth's famous rodeo and livestock show is the nation's oldest, drawing nearly a million people to Will Rogers Memorial Center for 30 rodeo performances. It's kicked off by the All-Western Parade, the biggest horse-drawn parade in the world. Call ✆ **817/877-2400.** Mid-January to early February.

### February

**Stock Show and Rodeo,** San Antonio. San Antonio hosts more than 2 weeks of rodeo events, livestock judging, country-and-western bands, and carnivals at the AT&T Center. Call ✆ **210/225-5851.** Early February.

**Mardi Gras,** Galveston. The city's biggest party of the year, with parades, masked balls, and a live-entertainment district around the Strand. Call ✆ **888/425-4753.** Late February to early March.

### March

**Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo,** Houston. Billed as the largest event of its kind, the rodeo includes all the usual events like bull riding and calf roping, plus performances by famous country-and-western artists. A parade downtown kicks off the celebration. Call ✆ **713/791-9000.** March 1 to March 20.

**South by Southwest,** Austin. The Austin Music Awards kick off this huge conference, with hundreds of concerts at more than two dozen city venues. Keynote speakers have included Johnny Cash. Call ✆ **512/467-7979.** Mid-March (during spring break at the University of Texas).

**Dyeing o' the River Green and Pub Crawl,** San Antonio. Are leprechauns responsible for turning the San Antonio River into the green River Shannon? Irish dance and music fill the Arneson River Theatre from the afternoon on. Call ✆ **210/227-4262.** March 17.

## April

**Texas Hill Country Wine and Food Festival,** Austin. Book a month in advance for the cooking demonstrations; beer, wine, and food tastings; and celebrity chef dinners. For the food fair, just turn up hungry. Call ✆ **512/329-0770.** First weekend after Easter.

**San Jacinto Festival and Texas History Day,** West Columbia. Highlights include a parade, talent show, arts and crafts show, and barbecue cook-off. The talent show, where you never know what's going to happen next, is the fun part. Call ✆ **800/938-4853** or 979/265-2508. Mid-April.

**International Festival,** Houston. This festival highlights the culture, food, music, and heritage of a different country every year. Call ✆ **713/926-6368.** Last 2 weekends in April.

**Fiesta San Antonio,** San Antonio. What started as a modest marking of Texas's independence more than 100 years ago is now a huge event, with an elaborately costumed royal court presiding over 10 days of revelry: parades, balls, food fests, sporting events, concerts, and art shows all over town. Call ✆ **877/SA-FIESTA** (723-4378) or 210/227-5191. Mid- to late April.

## May

**Art Car Parade and Ball,** Houston. The parade of decorated cars is marvelous and hilarious and attracts participants from around the country. The ball—held in a large downtown parking garage—is always a spirited event. Call ✆ **713/926-6368.** Second weekend in May.

**Tejano Conjunto Festival,** San Antonio. This festival celebrates the lively and unique blend of Mexican and German music born in South Texas. The best conjunto musicians perform at the largest event of its kind in the world. Call ✆ **210/271-3151.** Mid-May.

**Return of the Chili Queens,** San Antonio. An annual tribute to chili, with music, dancing, crafts demonstrations, and, of course, chili aplenty. Bring the Tums. Call ✆ **210/207-8600.** Memorial Day weekend.

## June

**American Institute of Architects Sandcastle Competition,** Galveston. More than 80 architectural and engineering firms from around the state build sand castles and sand sculptures, taking this pastime to new heights. Call ✆ **713/520-0155.** Early June.

**Juneteenth Festival,** state wide. News of the Emancipation Proclamation didn't reach Texas until June 19, 1865—nearly 3 years after Lincoln signed it. This day is celebrated with blues, jazz, and gospel music, family reunions, and a variety of events. Houston has a major celebration; call ✆ **713/284-8352** for more information. Weekend nearest June 19.

## July

**Gran Fiesta de Fort Worth,** Fort Worth. An outdoor festival celebrating Texas's Hispanic culture with Latin music, art, food, and parades. Call ✆ **214/855-1881.** Third week in July.

**Great Texas Mosquito Festival,** Clute. A joyous celebration to divert everyone from the annoying pest. Call ✆ **800/938-4853** or 979/265-2508. Late July.

**Miss Texas USA Pageant,** Lubbock. This annual beauty contest takes place at Lubbock Municipal Coliseum and area hotels. Call ✆ **800/692-4035** or 806/747-5232. Last week in July.

## August

***Austin Chronicle* Hot Sauce Festival,** Austin. The largest hot-sauce contest in the world features more than 300 salsa entries, judged by celebrity chefs and food editors. The music at this super party is hot, too. Call ✆ **512/454-5766.** Last Sunday in August.

### September

**Marfa Lights Festival,** Marfa. Celebration of the lights that inexplicably appear on the horizon just east of town. Expect street dances, live music, parades, and lots of food. Call ✆ **800/650-9696** or 915/729-4942. Labor Day weekend.

**Grapefest,** Fort Worth. Yes, Texas makes wine—some of it quite good. It flows freely at this, one of the country's biggest wine festivals. There's also live music and other entertainment. Call ✆ **817/410-3185.** Early September.

**Fiestas Patrias,** Houston. One of the largest community-sponsored parades in the Southwest celebrating Mexico's independence from Spain. Houston's several *ballet folklórico* troupes twirl their way through downtown streets in a pageant of color and traditional Mexican music. Call ✆ **713/926-2636.** Mid-September (around the 16th).

**Pioneer Days,** Fort Worth. A festival commemorating Fort Worth's early pioneer and cattle rancher heritage with country music, rodeos, and Wild West shows. Call ✆ **817/336-8791** or 625-7005. Mid-September.

**Bayfest!,** Corpus Christi. This huge festival fills Shoreline Drive from I-37 down to Bayfront Park with music, games, food, arts and crafts, and fireworks over the bay. Call ✆ **800/678-6232** or 361/881-1888. Late September.

**State Fair of Texas,** Dallas. The nation's biggest state fair, held at the fairgrounds built in 1936 in grand Art Deco style. Call ✆ **214/565-9931.** Late September to third week of October.

### October

**Commemorative Air Force Annual AIRSHO,** Midland. Come see vintage aircraft on display and strutting their stuff in flight. Call ✆ **800/624-6435** or 915/683-3381. First weekend in October.

**Wings over Houston Airshow,** Houston. This thrilling event usually features displays of current military aircraft and performances of aerial acrobatics. Call ✆ **281/531-9461.** Mid-October.

**Texas Jazz Festival,** Corpus Christi. This free and popular festival attracts hundreds of big-name musicians from across the United States. Call ✆ **800/678-6232** or 361/881-1888. Mid- to late October.

**Halloween,** Austin. One hundred thousand costumed revelers take over 7 blocks of historic 6th Street. Call ✆ **800/926-2282.** October 31.

### November

**South Padre Island Kite Festival,** South Padre Island. What could be more fun than flying a kite above blue waters? Or pretty to watch? For all those still young at heart. Call ✆ **800/678-6232** or 361/881-1888. Early November.

**Lighting Ceremony and River Walk Holiday Parade,** San Antonio. Trees and bridges along the river are illuminated by some 80,000 lights, and Santa Claus arrives on a boat during this floating river parade. Call ✆ **210/227-4262.** Friday after Thanksgiving.

### December

**Christmas in the Stockyards,** Fort Worth. Cowtown's classic Old West corner is lit up even more than usual for holiday shopping and caroling with a Texas accent. Call ✆ **817/626-7921.** Throughout December.

**Fiestas Navideñas,** San Antonio. The Mexican market hosts piñata parties, a blessing of the animals, and surprise visits from Pancho Claus. Call ✆ **210/207-8600.** Weekends in December.

**Zilker Park Tree Lighting,** Austin. The lighting of a magnificent 165-foot tree is followed by the Trail of Lights, a mile-long display of life-size holiday scenes. Call ✆ **512/499-6700.** Sundays through December 24.

**Harbor Lights Celebration,** Corpus Christi. The harbor is decked out for the holidays. There's an illuminated boat parade, fireworks, entertainment, and a visit from Santa Claus. Call ✆ **800/678-6232** or 361/881-1888. First weekend in December.

**Dickens on the Strand,** Galveston. This street party in this city's historic district features revelers dressed up in Victorian costume, parades, street vendors, and lots of entertainment. Call ✆ **409/765-7834.** First weekend in December.

**Las Posadas,** San Antonio. Children carrying candles lead a procession along the river, reenacting the search for lodging in a moving multifaith rendition of the Christmas story. Call ✆ **210/224-6163.** Second Sunday in December.



# 4 GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND

## GETTING TO TEXAS

### By Plane

Several airports have commercial service in Texas. The state's major airports are **Dallas/Fort Worth International (DFW), El Paso International (ELP), George Bush Intercontinental (IAH)** and **William P. Hobby (HOU)** in Houston, and **San Antonio International (SAT).** All major airlines fly to Texas; for a full list, see the appendix.

**IMMIGRATION & CUSTOMS CLEARANCE** International visitors arriving by air, no matter what the port of entry, should cultivate patience and resignation before setting foot on U.S. soil. U.S. airports have considerably beefed up security clearances in the years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and clearing Customs and Immigration can take as long as 2 hours.

### Long-Haul Flights: How to Stay Comfortable

- Your choice of airline and airplane will definitely affect your legroom. Find more details about U.S. airlines at **www.seatguru.com**. For international airlines, the research firm Skytrax has posted a list of average seat pitches at **www.airlinequality.com**.
- Emergency exit seats and bulkhead seats typically have the most legroom. Emergency exit seats are usually left unassigned until the day of a flight (to ensure that able-bodied passengers fill the seats); it's worth checking in online (if the airline offers that option) or getting to the ticket counter early to snag one of these spots. Many passengers find that bulkhead seating offers more legroom, but keep in mind that bulkhead seats have no storage space on the floor in front of you.
- To have two seats for yourself in a three-seat row, try for an aisle seat in a center section toward the back of coach. If you're traveling with a companion, book an aisle and a window seat. Middle seats are usually booked last, so chances are good you'll end up with three seats to yourselves. If a third passenger is assigned the middle seat, he or she will probably be more than happy to trade for a window or an aisle.
- To sleep, avoid the last row of any section or the row in front of an emergency exit, as these seats are the least likely to recline. Avoid seats near highly trafficked toilet areas. Avoid seats in the back of many jets—these can be narrower than those in the rest of coach.

Or reserve a window seat so you can rest your head and avoid being bumped in the aisle.
- Get up, walk around, and stretch every 60 to 90 minutes to keep your blood flowing. This helps avoid **deep vein thrombosis,** or "economy-class syndrome."
- Drink water before, during, and after your flight to combat the lack of humidity in airplane cabins. Avoid caffeine and alcohol, which will dehydrate you.

### By Car

If you're planning a road trip, it's a good idea to join the **American Automobile Association** (✆ **800/336-4357;** www.aaa.com). In Texas, AAA regional headquarters is at 6555 N. State Hwy. 161, Irving (✆ **469/221-6006**); there are also offices in many other cities, including Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, and San Antonio. Members can get excellent maps, tour guides, and emergency road service; they'll also help you plan an itinerary. Members can get free emergency road service by calling **AAA's emergency number** (✆ **800/AAA-HELP** [222-4357]).

More than 3,000 miles of interstate highways crisscross this huge state, connecting four major urban areas to each other and to cities in nearby states. Some relevant mileages: Houston to New Orleans, 350 miles; Houston to Phoenix, 1,180 miles; Dallas to Little Rock, 320 miles; Dallas to Kansas City, 550 miles; and Dallas to Denver, 880 miles.

For listings of the major car-rental agencies in Texas, see the appendix.

### By Train

**Amtrak** (✆ **800/USA-RAIL** [872-7245]; www.amtrak.com) has several routes through Texas. The **Sunset Limited** has stops at Beaumont/Port Arthur, Houston, San Antonio, Del Rio, Sanderson, Alpine, and El Paso on its New Orleans–to–Los Angeles run; the **Heartland Flyer** travels from Oklahoma City to Fort Worth (where it connects with the Texas Eagle); and the **Texas Eagle** runs from Los Angeles to San Antonio (where you can connect with the Sunset Limited) and on to Chicago, with stops at El Paso, Austin, Dallas, and Fort Worth.

## GETTING AROUND

Texas is huge, so it's highly unlikely you'll want to try to see it all in one visit. Most visitors will explore either one or two cities or a relatively small section of the state. For those visiting major cities, it's easy to fly in, use public transportation, and then fly or take the train to the next city (see the individual city chapters for airline and rail information). However, those who plan to see a variety of Texas locales—within reasonable distance—will find that the most practical way to see Texas is by car.

### By Plane

A number of airlines offer flights between Texas's major cities; see the "Essentials" sections in the destination chapters for airline information.

Overseas visitors can take advantage of the APEX (Advance Purchase Excursion) reductions offered by all major U.S. and European carriers. In addition, some large airlines offer transatlantic or transpacific passengers special discount tickets under the name **Visit USA,** which allows mostly one-way travel from one U.S. destination to another at very low prices. Unavailable in the U.S., these discount tickets must be purchased abroad in conjunction with your international fare. This system is the easiest, fastest, cheapest way to see the country.

### By Car

If you're visiting from abroad and plan to rent a car in the United States, keep in mind that foreign driver's licenses are usually recognized in the U.S., but you should get an international one if your home license is not in English.

**Fun Facts** **On the Road Again**

Texas maintains 77,000 miles of roadways, including interstates, U.S. highways, state highways, and farm-to-market (designated FM on signs) roads. Furthermore, it has some 48,000 bridges on public roads—the most in the nation.

Check out **Breezenet.com,** which offers domestic car-rental discounts with some of the most competitive rates around. Also worth visiting are Orbitz, Hotwire.com, Travelocity, and Priceline.com, all of which offer competitive online car-rental rates. For additional car-rental agencies, see the appendix.

Driving is an excellent way to see Texas in small chunks—roads are well maintained and well marked, and a car is often the most economical and convenient way to get some where; in fact, if you plan to explore beyond the cities—which we highly recommend—it's practically the only way to get to some places.

Once you leave the interstates, there is a veritable spider web of roads that will take you just about anywhere you want to go, at least until you venture into the vast emptiness of the southwest plains. This seemingly uncharted area contains two of the gems of the state, however: Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains national parks. These two places make it worth the effort of finding a way to get there.

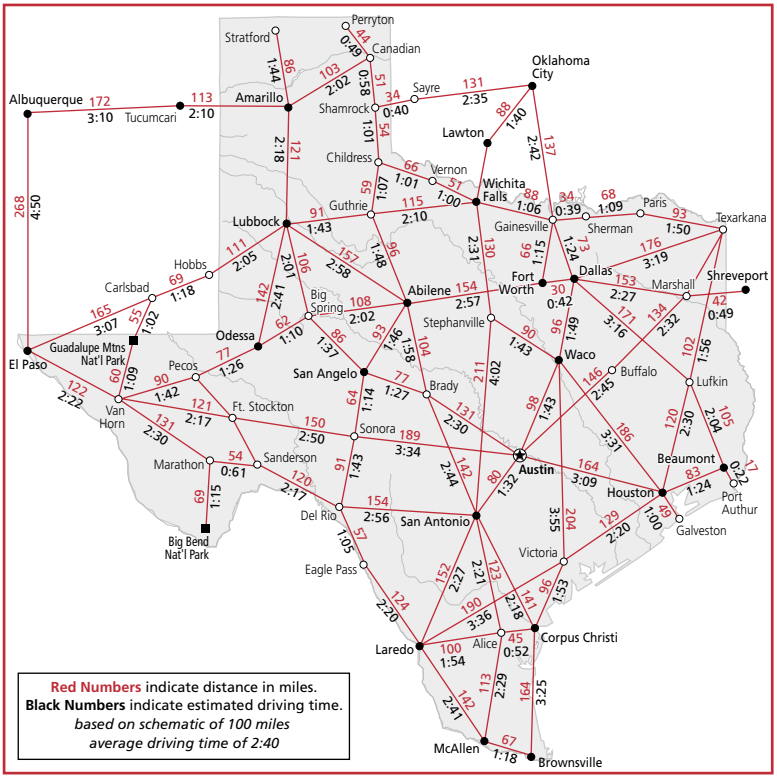
Traffic in major cities, such as Houston, Dallas, and Austin, can be very congested and frustrating, especially at rush hour, and distances are often great. Be sure to leave extra time to get places. Away from the cities, you'll often find the roads to be practically deserted.

Because much of Texas has a relatively mild climate, snow and ice are not usually a problem. However, those traveling to or through Amarillo and other northern sections of the state in winter should check weather reports frequently—being stranded by an ice storm is not unheard of.

**INSURANCE** If you hold a private auto insurance policy, you probably are covered for loss or damage to the rental car, and liability in case a passenger is injured. The credit card you used to rent the car also may provide some coverage.

Car-rental insurance probably does not cover liability if you caused the accident. Check your own auto insurance policy, the rental company policy, and your credit card coverage for the extent of coverage: Is your destination covered? Are other drivers covered? How much liability is covered if a passenger is injured? (If you rely on your credit card for coverage, you may want to bring a second credit card, as damages may be charged to your card and you may find yourself stranded with no money.)

**DRIVING RULES** Texas law requires all drivers to carry proof of insurance, as well as a valid driver's license. Safety belts must be worn by all front-seat occupants of cars and light trucks; children 16 and under must wear safety belts regardless of where they are in the vehicle; and children 3 and under or under 36 inches tall, regardless of where they're sitting, must be in approved child seats. The maximum speed limit on interstate highways is 70 mph; and the maximum on numbered non-interstates is 70 mph during daylight and 65 mph at night, unless other wise posted. Motorcyclists are required to wear helmets, and radar detectors are legal.




**MAPS** A good state highway map is available free at any state information center or by mail (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter). Maps can also be purchased at bookstores, gas stations, and most supermarkets and discount stores.

**ROAD CONDITIONS** Texas roads are among the best in the western United States, and the state's generally moderate weather keeps snow closures to a minimum. However, icy roads are fairly common in the northern sections of the state during winter, and hurricanes can cause flooding in late summer and early fall along the Gulf Coast. A recorded **24-hour hot line** (✆ **800/452-9292**) provides information on road conditions statewide, and information is also available online at www.dot.state.tx.us/travel/road_conditions.htm.

## By Train

More than a dozen towns and cities in Texas are linked by rail, with mostly daily service from Amtrak. See "Getting There & Getting Around," above, and individual destinations for more information.

International visitors can buy a **USA Rail Pass,** good for 15 or 30 days of

### Tips The "Drive Friendly" State

For years the Texas Department of Transportation has been urging motorists to "drive friendly," and apparently many of them, especially in rural areas, have taken that message to heart. When you approach a vehicle from behind on a two-lane road, more often than not that vehicle will pull onto the shoulder, while maintaining speed, to let you pass without having to go into the oncoming lane. Fortunately, most Texas state highways have good, wide shoulders so there's little danger. We're not sure if this is technically legal or not, but everybody in rural Texas does it, including state troopers. However, road rage is not uncommon in Texas, and I usually think twice before sending an obscene gesture the way of a driver who has just cut me off—especially if that driver's in a pickup toting a gun rack on the back.

unlimited travel on **Amtrak** (✆ **800/USA-RAIL** [872-7245]; www.amtrak.com). The pass is available online or through many overseas travel agents. See Amtrak's website for the cost of travel within the western, eastern, or northwestern United States. Reservations are generally required and should be made as early as possible. Regional rail passes are also available.

### By Bus

Bus travel is often the most economical form of public transit for short hops between U.S. cities, but it's certainly not an option for everyone (particularly when Amtrak, which is far more luxurious, offers similar rates). **Greyhound** (✆ **800/231-2222;** www.greyhound.com) is the sole nationwide bus line. International visitors can obtain information about the **Greyhound North American Discovery Pass.** The pass can be obtained from foreign travel agents or through www.discoverypass.com for unlimited travel and stopovers in the U.S. and Canada.

## 5 MONEY & COSTS

In general, Texas is not overly expensive, especially compared to destinations on the East and West coasts. You'll find a wide range of prices for lodging and dining, and admission to most attractions is less than $10 (it's sometimes free, especially in the smaller towns). Prices in Dallas, Houston, and Austin now place them firmly in line with those in large Southern cities such as Atlanta and Miami. Smaller cities and rural areas are much less expensive, while resort areas such as Corpus Christi can be a bit more expensive, especially during winter holidays. Traveler's checks and credit cards are accepted at almost all hotels, restaurants, shops, and attractions, plus many grocery stores; and ATMs are practically everywhere.

The most common bills are the $1 (a "buck"), $5, $10, and $20 denominations. There are also $2 bills (seldom encountered), $50 bills, and $100 bills (the last two are usually not welcome as payment for small purchases).

Coins come in seven denominations: 1¢ (1 cent, or a penny); 5¢ (5 cents, or a

nickel); 10¢ (10 cents, or a dime); 25¢ (25 cents, or a quarter); 50¢ (50 cents, or a half dollar); the gold-colored Sacagawea coin, worth $1; and the rare silver dollar.

## ATMS

Nationwide, the easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine), sometimes referred to as a "cash machine" or "cashpoint." The **Cirrus** (✆ **800/424-7787;** www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (✆ **800/843-7587;** www.visa.com) networks span the country; you can find them even in remote regions. Look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) and daily withdrawal limit before you depart. ***Note:*** Remember that many banks impose a fee every time you use a card at another bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to $5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than $2). In addition, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. To compare banks' ATM fees within the U.S., use **www.bankrate.com**. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

## CREDIT CARDS & DEBIT CARDS

Credit cards are the most widely used form of payment in the United States: **Visa** (Barclaycard in Britain), **MasterCard** (Eurocard in Europe), **American Express, Diners Club,** and **Discover.** They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN.

Visitors from outside the U.S. should inquire whether their bank assesses a 1% to 3% fee on charges incurred abroad.

It's highly recommended that you travel with at least one major credit card. You must have one to rent a car, and hotels and airlines usually require a credit card imprint as a deposit against expenses.

ATM cards with major credit card backing, known as **"debit cards,"** are now a commonly acceptable form of payment in most stores and restaurants. Debit cards draw money directly from your checking account. Some stores enable you to receive "cash back" on your debit-card purchases as well. The same is true at most U.S. post offices.

## TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are widely accepted in the U.S., but foreign visitors should make sure that they're denominated in U.S. dollars; foreign-currency checks are often difficult to exchange.

You can buy traveler's checks at most banks. Most are offered in denominations of $20, $50, $100, $500, and sometimes $1,000. Generally, you'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%.

The most popular traveler's checks are offered by **American Express** (✆ **800/807-6233,** or 800/221-7282 for cardholders; this number accepts collect calls, offers service in several foreign languages, and exempts Amex gold and platinum cardholders from the 1% fee); **Visa** (✆ **800/732-1322;** AAA members can obtain Visa checks for a $9.95 fee, for checks up to $1,500, at most AAA offices or by calling ✆ **866/339-3378**); and **MasterCard** (✆ **800/223-9920**).

If you do choose to carry traveler's checks, keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

## Texas: Gateway to Mexico

Many travelers believe that a vacation in western or southern Texas would not be complete without an excursion across the border into Mexico, to visit the picturesque shops, dicker for colorful pottery and inexpensive jewelry, and sample genuine Mexican food. In our experience, the shopping is especially enjoyable—you really can get some bargains—and the food is great, though we generally stay away from street vendors and patronize only the well-established restaurants. Mexican border towns welcome tourists and almost universally accept U.S. currency—in fact, for many of these communities, tourism is their primary source of income.

However, remember that a trip across the border, even if you just walk across for the afternoon, is in fact a trip to a foreign country, and the laws of Mexico, not the United States, apply. In addition, these border towns are often hotbeds of drug smuggling, so stick to the main tourist areas, and don't let anyone try to convince you to carry anything across the border for them.

U.S. and Canadian citizens must carry a passport if they plan on crossing back into the U.S. A Mexican tourist card (available from Mexican officials at the border) is required for those going beyond the border towns into Mexico's interior, or those planning to stay in the border towns for more than 72 hours. Other foreign nationals will need a passport and the appropriate visas.

Travelers driving cars beyond the border towns will need vehicle permits, available from Mexican officials at the border, and those driving cars across the border for any distance at all should first buy insurance from a Mexican insurance company (short-term insurance is available at the border and at travel clubs such as AAA). If you're only planning to cross the border, visit a few shops,

# 6 HEALTH

Vacationers in Texas generally need take no extra health precautions than they would at home. It is worth noting, however, that those hiking in the drier parts of the state, such as in the deserts of West Texas or the mountains of Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains national parks, should carry more water than they think they will need, and drink it.

When heading into the great outdoors, keep in mind that Texas has a large number of poisonous snakes and insects, and you should be very careful where you put your hands and feet. If you're hiking, stick to designated hiking areas, stay on established trails, and carry rain gear. When boating, wear a life jacket.

## GENERAL AVAILABILITY OF HEALTHCARE

Unless you're camping out in remote Big Bend and other areas, over-the-counter medicines are widely available, as are generic equivalents of common prescription drugs.

Contact the **International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (IAMAT; ✆ 716/754-4883,** or 416/652-0137 in Canada; www.iamat.org) for tips on travel and health concerns and for

maybe sample the Mexican food, and then cross back into Texas, consider leaving your car on U.S. soil and walking. This will save the hassles of getting Mexican car insurance and the red tape if you are involved in an accident; of course, then you'll end up having to carry any purchases you make.

***Warning:*** It is a felony to take any type of firearm or ammunition into Mexico (you could easily end up in jail and have your car confiscated). In addition, there are a number of regulations regarding taking pets across the border, plus fees, so it is usually best to board pets on the U.S. side.

When reentering the United States from Mexico, you will be stopped and questioned by U.S. Customs officials, and your car may be searched. U.S. citizens may bring back up to $800 in purchases duty-free every 30 days, including 1 liter of liquor, 100 cigars (except Cuban cigars, which are prohibited), and one carton of cigarettes. Duty fees are charged above those amounts, and Texas charges a tax of about $1 per liter on all alcoholic beverages. Items that may not be brought into the United States, or which require special permits, include most fruits and vegetables, plants, animals, and meat.

The above is just a brief summary of the complex laws related to traveling between the U.S. and Mexico. There are more details in the official state vacation guide available from the Texas Department of Transportation (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter), and for complete information contact **U.S. Customs** (✆ **202/354-1000;** www.cbp.gov) and the **Mexican Government Tourism Office** (✆ **800/446-3942** or 713/722-2581; mgtotx@ix.netcom.com). A good online source of information is **www.mexonline.com**.



lists of doctors. The United States **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (✆ **800/311-3435;** www.cdc.gov) provides up-to-date information on health hazards by region or country and offers tips on food safety. The website **www.tripprep.com**, sponsored by a consortium of travel medicine practitioners, may also offer helpful advice on traveling abroad. You can find listings of reliable clinics overseas at the **International Society of Travel Medicine** (www.istm.org).

## COMMON AILMENTS

**DIETARY RED FLAGS** While Tex-Mex cuisine is generally milder than Mexican cooking, travelers who are unfamiliar with hot chiles and jalapeños or who have weak stomachs or ulcers should proceed with caution when eating Mexican food. Tap water is potable throughout the state, but not to everyone's liking. Texans are big meat eaters in general, but in larger cities, vegetarian-friendly restaurants are widely available.

**BUGS, BITES & OTHER WILDLIFE CONCERNS** If you venture into the West Texas desert, snakes, spiders, and scorpions could be an issue, so it would be wise to carry appropriate medicines, especially if camping.

**SUN/ELEMENTS/EXTREME WEATHER EXPOSURE** Perhaps the biggest health concern in Texas, with its big sky and blistering heat, is sun exposure. Travelers should make every attempt to protect themselves, including headgear, sunscreen, and sufficient hydration.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

Most reliable healthcare plans provide coverage if you get sick away from home. If you get sick in Texas, consider asking your hotel concierge to recommend a local doctor—even his or her own. You can also try the emergency room at a local hospital; many have walk-in clinics for emergency cases that are not life-threatening.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage, and carry them in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Visitors from outside the U.S. should carry generic names of prescription drugs. For U.S. travelers, most reliable healthcare plans provide coverage if you get sick away from home. Foreign visitors may have to pay medical costs upfront and be reimbursed later. See "Medical Insurance," under "Travel Insurance," in the appendix.

We also list **additional emergency numbers** in the appendix.

# 7 SAFETY

Most areas of Texas are as safe as any other part of the U.S. However, large cities such as Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio have their share of big-city crime (a few years back, downtown Houston had a particularly dangerous reputation), as do border towns such as El Paso. Drug smuggling is common along the U.S.–Mexico border. To steer clear of stumbling into a drug transaction or police raid, avoid hiking alone in isolated areas along the border and stay in the major tourist areas in border towns.

If you're in doubt about which neighborhoods are safe, don't hesitate to make inquiries with the hotel front desk staff or the local tourist office.

## DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION

Texas has a lamentable history of race-related incidents, and bigoted and racist opinions are still found in some small towns and among some less cosmopolitan Texans. Regrettably, discrimination is still occasionally directed toward African Americans and Hispanics (and, more recently, people of Middle Eastern descent or appearance), as well as openly gay travelers. However, most travelers of color and ethnicity, and gays and lesbians, will likely encounter few (if any) problems. African-American travelers may want to be cautious, however, when traveling through the small towns of East Texas; see "Race Relations in East Texas," on p. 208. Also, around border towns, travelers of Hispanic descent or appearance may find that they are stopped by the border patrol more frequently than non-Hispanics, so be sure to carry a current, government-issued picture ID. See also "Gay & Lesbian Travelers," below.

# 8 SPECIALIZED TRAVEL RESOURCES

## TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Most disabilities shouldn't stop anyone from traveling in the U.S. Thanks to provisions in the Americans with Disabilities Act, most public places are required to comply with disability-friendly regulations. Almost all public establishments (including hotels, restaurants, museums, and so on, but not including certain

National Historic Landmarks), and at least some modes of public transportation, provide accessible entrances and other facilities for those with disabilities.

The **America the Beautiful—National Park and Federal Recreational Lands Pass—Access Pass** (formerly the **Golden Access Passport**) gives persons who are visually impaired or permanently disabled (regardless of age) free lifetime entrance to federal recreation sites administered by the National Park Service (NPS), including the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation. This may include national parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, and national wildlife refuges. The pass can be obtained only in person at any NPS facility that charges an entrance fee. You need to show proof of a medically determined disability. Besides free entry, the pass also offers a 50% discount on some federal-use fees charged for such facilities as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and tours. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/fees_passes.htm, or call the United States Geological Survey (USGS), which issues the passes, at ✆ **888/275-8747.**

For more about organizations that offer resources to travelers with disabilities, go to Frommers.com.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Texas is one of only four states (the others are Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma) that criminalize homosexual activity, with an antisodomy law that dates to the late 1800s. That law is occasionally enforced (two Houston men were arrested in 1998, spent a day in jail, and paid fines), but a gay-rights group is working to have the law overturned.

Despite the official policy, most gay and lesbian travelers will find they are treated just like any other visitors to Texas, as Texans generally have a "live and let live" attitude. There are vibrant gay and lesbian communities in all of the larger cities, particularly Austin, Dallas, and Houston.

The **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association** (**IGLTA;** ✆ **800/448-8550** or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. Among them are **Above and Beyond Tours** (✆ **800/397-2681;** www.abovebeyondtours.com); **Now, Voyager** (✆ **800/255-6951;** www.nowvoyager.com); and **Olivia Cruises & Resorts** (✆ **800/631-6277;** www.olivia.com).

**Gay.com Travel** (✆ **800/929-2268** or 415/644-8044; www.gay.com/travel or www.outandabout.com) is an excellent online successor to the popular ***Out & About*** print magazine. It provides regularly updated information about gay-owned, gay-oriented, and gay-friendly lodging, dining, sightseeing, nightlife, and shopping establishments in every important destination worldwide.

For more gay and lesbian travel resources visit Frommers.com.

## SENIOR TRAVELERS

Many Texas hotels and motels offer discounts to seniors (especially if you're carrying an AARP card; see below), and an increasing number of restaurants, attractions, and public transportation systems do so as well.

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (✆ **888/687-2277;** www.aarp.org), often get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

The U.S. National Park Service offers an **America the Beautiful—National Park and Federal Recreational Lands Pass—Senior Pass** (formerly the **Golden Age Passport**), which gives seniors 62 years or older lifetime entrance to all properties administered by the National Park Service (NPS)—national parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, and national wildlife refuges—for a one-time processing fee of $10. The pass must be purchased in person at any NPS facility that charges an entrance fee. Besides free entry, the America the Beautiful Senior Pass also offers a 50% discount on some federal-use fees charged for such facilities as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and tours. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/fees_passes.htm or call the United States Geological Survey (USGS), which issues the passes, at ✆ **888/275-8747.**

Frommers.com offers more information and resources on travel for seniors.

## FAMILY TRAVEL

Texas is a family-friendly state, with lots of things for all ages to enjoy. Throughout this book you'll find numerous attractions, lodgings, and even restaurants that are especially well suited to kids. These include places such as the Fort Worth Zoo, Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington, the Children's Museum of Houston, and the Zilker Zephyr Miniature Trail in Austin. See the "Best" selections in chapter 1, as well as "Especially for Kids" sightseeing sections in destination chapters.

To locate accommodations, restaurants, and attractions that are particularly kid-friendly, refer to the "Kids" icon throughout this guide.

For a list of more family-friendly travel resources, turn to the experts at Frommers.com.

## STUDENT TRAVEL

The top spots for college students heading to Texas for spring break are **South Padre Island** for sun and fun and, to a lesser extent, **Big Bend National Park** for serious hiking, but all of the beach areas and parks are popular.

Check out the **International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC)** (www.istc.org) website for comprehensive travel services information and details on how to get an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC),** which qualifies students for substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, entrance fees, and more. It also provides students with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is valid for a maximum of 18 months. You can apply for the card online or in person at **STA Travel** (✆ **800/781-4040** in North America; ✆ 132 782 in Australia; ✆ 0871 2 300 040 in the U.K.; www.statravel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world; check out the website to locate STA Travel offices worldwide. If you're no longer a student but are still 25 or under, you can get an **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** from the same people, which entitles you to some discounts. **Travel CUTS** (✆ **800/592-2887;** www.travelcuts.com) offers similar services for both Canadians and U.S. residents. Irish students may prefer to turn to **USIT** (✆ **01/602-1904;** www.usit.ie), an Ireland-based specialist in student, youth, and independent travel.

## VEGETARIAN TRAVEL

While carnivorous Texans are famous for their cattle raising, vegetarian options, although perhaps not as prevalent as in the most progressive states, are available in all large cities, and are particularly conspicuous in Austin, the largest college town in Texas and the state's most progressive-leaning city (ranked by GoVeg.com as

America's eighth-most-vegetarian-friendly large city, it is home to the ever-growing chain Whole Foods). Some helpful websites include **www.vegetarianusa.com/city/Texas.html**, which includes a list of health food stores and vegetarian restaurants; **www.ecomall.com/vegi/tex.htm**, which contains a smattering of restaurants across the state; and the general sites **VegDining.com** and **VegCooking.com.**

## TRAVELING WITH PETS

If you're considering traveling to Texas with your pet, websites worth consulting include **www.petswelcome.com**, **www.pettravel.com**, and **www.travelpets.com**. Note that all Motel 6 motels accept pets. Throughout this book, we note lodgings that accept pets. Some properties require you to pay a fee or damage deposit in advance, and most insist they be notified at check-in that you have a pet.

Be aware, however, that national parks and monuments and other federal lands administered by the National Park Service are not pet-friendly. Dogs are generally prohibited on hiking trails, must always be leashed, and in some cases cannot be taken more than 100 feet from established roads. On the other hand, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) areas, as well as many state parks, are pet-friendly, allowing dogs on trails and just about everywhere except inside buildings. State parks require that dogs be leashed; regulations in national forests and BLM lands are generally looser.

Just as people need extra water in the desert, so do pets. We especially like those clever little no-spill pet water bowls available in pet stores (or online at www.vetvax.com). Also keep in mind that many trails are rough, and jagged rocks can cut the pads on your dog's feet. One final note: Never leave a dog or cat inside a closed car parked in the sun, which can literally be a killer in Texas. The car heats up more quickly than you'd think—so don't do it, even for a minute.



# 9 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

**Sustainable tourism** is conscientious travel. It means being careful with the environments you explore, and respecting the communities you visit. Two overlapping components of sustainable travel are **eco-tourism** and **ethical tourism.** The **International Ecotourism Society** (TIES) defines eco-tourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. TIES suggests that eco-tourists follow these principles:

- Minimize environmental impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation and for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
- Support international human rights and labor agreements.

You can find eco-friendly travel tips and statistics, as well as touring companies and associations—listed by destination under "Travel Choice"—at the **TIES** website, www.ecotourism.org. Also check out **Ecotravel.com,** which lets you search for sustainable touring companies in several categories (water-based, land-based, spiritually oriented, and so on).

While much of the focus of eco-tourism is about reducing impacts on the natural

## Tips It's Easy Being Green

Here are a few simple ways you can help conserve fuel and energy when you travel:

- Each time you take a flight or drive a car, greenhouse gases release into the atmosphere. You can help neutralize this danger to the planet through "carbon offsetting"—paying someone to invest your money in programs that reduce your greenhouse gas emissions by the same amount you've added. Before buying carbon offset credits, just make sure that you're using a reputable company, one with a proven program that invests in renewable energy. Reliable carbon offset companies include **Carbonfund** (www.carbonfund.org), **TerraPass** (www.terrapass.org), and **Carbon Neutral** (www.carbonneutral.org).
- Whenever possible, choose nonstop flights; they generally require less fuel than indirect flights that stop and take off again. Try to fly during the day—some scientists estimate that nighttime flights are twice as harmful to the environment. And pack light—each 15 pounds of luggage on a 5,000-mile flight adds up to 50 pounds of carbon dioxide emitted.
- Where you stay during your travels can have a major environmental impact. To determine the green credentials of a property, ask about trash disposal and recycling, water conservation, and energy use; also question if sustainable materials were used in the construction of the property. The website **www.greenhotels.com** recommends green-rated member hotels around

environment, ethical tourism concentrates on ways to preserve and enhance local economies and communities, regardless of location. You can embrace ethical tourism by staying at a locally owned hotel or shopping at a store that employs local workers and sells locally produced goods.

**Responsible Travel** (www.responsibletravel.com) is a great source of sustainable travel ideas; the site is run by a spokesperson for ethical tourism in the travel industry. **Sustainable Travel International** (www.sustainabletravelinternational.org) promotes ethical tourism practices, and manages an extensive directory of sustainable properties and tour operators around the world.

In the U.K., **Tourism Concern** (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) works to reduce social and environmental problems connected to tourism. The **Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO)** (www.aito.co.uk) is a group of specialist operators leading the field in making holidays sustainable.

**Volunteer travel** has become increasingly popular among those who want to venture beyond the standard group-tour experience to learn languages, interact with locals, and make a positive difference while on vacation. Volunteer travel usually doesn't require special skills—just a willingness to work hard—and programs vary in length from a few days to a number of weeks. Some programs provide free housing and food, but many require volunteers to pay for travel expenses, which can add up quickly.

the world that fulfill the company's stringent environmental requirements. Also consult **www.environmentallyfriendlyhotels.com** for green accommodations ratings.

- At hotels, request that your sheets and towels not be changed daily. (Many hotels already have programs like this in place.) Turn off the lights and air conditioner (or heater) when you leave your room.
- Use public transport where possible—trains, buses, and even taxis are more energy-efficient forms of transport than driving. Even better is to walk or cycle; you'll produce zero emissions and stay fit and healthy on your travels.
- If renting a car is necessary, ask the rental agent for a hybrid, or rent the most fuel-efficient car available. You'll use less gas and save money at the tank.
- Eat at locally owned and operated restaurants that use produce grown in the area. This contributes to the local economy and cuts down on greenhouse gas emissions by supporting restaurants where the food is not flown or trucked in across long distances. Visit **Sustain Lane** (www.sustainlane.org) to find sustainable eating and drinking choices around the U.S.; also check out **www.eatwellguide.org** for tips on eating sustainably in the U.S. and Canada.

For general info on volunteer travel, visit **www.volunteerabroad.org** and **www.idealist.org**.

Before you commit to a volunteer program, it's important to make sure any money you're giving is truly going back to the local community, and that the work you'll be doing will be a good fit for you. **Volunteer International** (www.volunteerinternational.org) has a helpful list of questions to ask to determine the intentions and the nature of a volunteer program.

Much of Texas's eco-tourism activities are still confined to do-it-yourself trips to state and national parks (with Big Bend the number-one attraction). However, birding is of growing interest, particularly along the Gulf Coast and in other parts of South Texas, and some travel operators now offer birding trips.

Texas Parks and Wildlife devotes part of its literature and website to **"Great Texas Wildlife Trails"** (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_trails) that include birding trails. Additionally, the **World Birding Center** (www.worldbirdingcenter.org) is located in the lower Rio Grande Valley, and it offers a wealth of information on birding events, tours, and sites, such as the 50-acre **South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center** (✆ **956/761-3005**). Another resource is www.traveltex.com, where you can search under "Activities" for a mixed bag of "nature & outdoors" events, tours, and activities.

## Frommers.com: The Complete Travel Resource

Planning a trip or just returned? Head to **Frommers.com,** voted Best Travel Site by *PC Magazine*. We think you'll find our site indispensable before, during, and after your travels—with expert advice and tips; independent reviews of hotels, restaurants, attractions, and preferred shopping and nightlife venues; vacation giveaways; and an online booking tool. We publish the complete contents of more than 135 travel guides in our **Destinations** section, covering more than 4,000 places worldwide. Each weekday, we publish original articles that report on **Deals and News** via our free **Frommers.com Newsletters.** What's more, **Arthur Frommer** himself blogs 5 days a week, with cutting opinions about the state of travel in the modern world. We're betting you'll find our **Events** listings an invaluable resource; it's an up-to-the-minute roster of what's happening in cities everywhere—including concerts, festivals, lectures, and more. We've also added weekly **podcasts, interactive maps,** and hundreds of new images across the site. Finally, don't forget to visit our **Message Boards,** where you can join in conversations with thousands of fellow Frommer's travelers and post your trip report once you return.

## 10 PACKAGES FOR THE INDEPENDENT TRAVELER

Package tours are simply a way to buy the airfare, accommodations, and other elements of your trip (such as car rentals, airport transfers, and sometimes even activities) at the same time and often at discounted prices.

One good source of package deals is the airlines themselves. Most major airlines offer air/land packages, including **American Airlines Vacations** (✆ 800/321-2121; www.aavacations.com), **Delta Vacations** (✆ 800/221-6666; www.deltavacations.com), **Continental Airlines Vacations** (✆ 800/301-3800; www.covacations.com), and **United Vacations** (✆ 888/854-3899; www.unitedvacations.com). Several big **online travel agencies**—Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, Site59, and Last-minute.com—also do a brisk business in packages.

Travel packages are also listed in the travel section of your local Sunday newspaper. Or check ads in the national travel magazines such as *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine, Travel + Leisure, National Geographic Traveler,* and *Condé Nast Traveler.*

For more information on package tours and for tips on booking your trip, see Frommers.com.

## 11 ESCORTED GENERAL-INTEREST TOURS

Escorted tours are structured group tours, with a group leader. The price usually includes everything from airfare to hotels, meals, tours, admission costs, and local transportation.

**Gray Line Tours** (✆ **800/803-5073;** www.grayline.com), one of the largest tour operators in the world, organizes a number of escorted bus trips, package tours, and day trips in Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, Houston/Galveston, San Antonio, and South Padre Island—though it's most active in Dallas and Fort Worth.

**Si Texas Tours,** in Bandera, Texas (✆ **888/748-3927** or 830/460-4565; www.sitexastours.com), offers escorted tours to San Antonio, the Texas Hill Country, and South Texas.

At InfoHub (www.infohub.com/TRAVEL/SIT/sit_pages/Texas.html), you'll find links to a number of other themed trips (such as cycling the Hill Country).

Although escorted tours require big deposits and predetermined hotels, restaurants, and itineraries, many people derive security and peace of mind from the structure they offer. Escorted tours—whether they're navigated by bus, motor coach, train, or boat—let travelers sit back and enjoy the trip without having to drive or worry about details. They take you to the maximum number of sights in the minimum amount of time with the least amount of hassle. They're particularly convenient for people with limited mobility, and they can be a great way to make new friends.

On the downside, you'll have little opportunity for serendipitous interactions with locals. The tours can be jampacked with activities, leaving little room for individual sightseeing, whim, or adventure—plus they often focus on the heavily touristed sites, so you miss out on many a lesser-known gem.

For more information on escorted general-interest tours, including questions to ask before booking your trip, see Frommers.com.



## 12 SPECIAL-INTEREST TRIPS

### ADVENTURE TRIPS

With a state as huge as Texas, you'd expect lots of outdoor adventures, and although there are lots of opportunities for outdoor activities in Texas, the state hasn't quite caught on with most of the major national adventure-travel companies. For adventure travel to Texas, check out **GORPtravel** (✆ **877/440-GORP** [440-4677] or 303/516-1153; http://gorptravel.away.com), which offers several Texas trips, ranging from rafting or canoeing the Rio Grande to Old West dude ranch vacations, where you get to play cowboy when you're not busy fishing, swimming, or just loafing. Another good national company that offers bicycling tours, walking tours, and multisport adventures in Texas is **Planet Earth Adventures** (✆ **800/923-4453;** www.planetearthadventures.com). Multiactivity adventures in Texas are also available from **Tauck World Discovery** (✆ **800/788-7885** or 203/221-6891; www.tauck.com), which features a working-ranch trip. The **Audubon Society** (✆ **800/967-7425;** www.audubon.org) occasionally offers what it calls "nature odysseys" in Texas, with birding destinations such as Big Bend National Park.

You can obtain information on the state's outfitters, including numerous hunting and fishing guides, from the **Texas Outfitters and Guides Association,** P.O. Box 33141, Kerrville, TX 78029-3141 (✆ **830/238-4207**).

### CAMPING & OUTDOORS

Texas is dotted with lakes and has numerous rivers, almost 700 miles of Gulf Coast, plenty of forestlands, and several mountain ranges. Its two national parks offer plentiful hiking opportunities, and there

are also scenic canyons, spectacular caves, and vast areas of rugged desert.

The **official state vacation guide** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) is a good source of information for those planning outdoor recreation in the state. Information on fishing, hunting, and the numerous state parks in Texas is available from the **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** (✆ **800/792-1112** or 512/389-8950; www.tpwd.state.tx.us). Reservations for camping at state parks can be made through the department's website or by calling ✆ **512/389-8900.** General outdoor recreation information is also online at **www.texasoutside.com**.

Both RV and tent **campers** will find plenty of campsites throughout Texas, although tent campers will have fewer choices, especially along the Gulf Coast where numerous RV parks cater to "Winter Texans"—usually retired residents of northern states and Canada who spend winters in the sunny warmth of Texas and often arrive in plush motor homes or large trailers. The **Texas Association of Campground Owners** (✆ **800/657-6555** or 512/459-8226; www.texascampgrounds.com) offers a free booklet describing commercial campgrounds and RV parks in Texas and New Mexico. It's a generally good guide, with fairly complete information and directions, but, unfortunately, it does not include rates. However, it does include a "Texas Saver Card," for discounts of 10% or 15% at many facilities.

## FOOD & WINE TRIPS

**Texas Wine Tours** (✆ **877/839-9463;** www.texas-wine-tours.com) takes trips to 14 Hill Country wineries, including stops in Fredericksburg and occasional events in places such as Luckenbach. Wine tours in white stretch limos are the focus of **Wine Tours of Texas** (✆ **877/693-0800** or 512/458-5466; www.winetoursoftexas.com).

## ACTIVITIES A TO Z

Texas offers a wide variety of outdoor activities, and moderately year-round temperatures in most of the state give you more time to do them.

**BIRD-WATCHING & WILDLIFE VIEWING** Texas has some of the best bird-watching opportunities in the United States, especially along the Gulf Coast, where you often see colorful Neotropical species found nowhere else in the United States. Check out the numerous national wildlife refuges, or stop practically anywhere along the coast—we like the Rockport. You can get bird checklists from most visitor centers and wildlife refuges, and online from the **Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center** (www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/chekbird/r2/48.htm). Also, check with the **Audubon Society** (✆ **800/967-7425;** www.audubon.org) to see what the national organization and its various Texas chapters are offering in the way of birding tours. Wildlife viewing is especially good at Big Bend National Park (see chapter 11).

**BOATING** Opportunities for boating are abundant along the Gulf Coast—there are boat ramps practically everywhere—but the state's many lakes are also ideal for boating. Especially good is Amistad National Recreation Area, a huge lake along the U.S.–Mexico border in West Texas; see "Del Rio & Amistad National Recreation Area," in chapter 10.

**DUDE RANCHING** As one would expect in a major cattle-ranching state like Texas, there are ample opportunities for visitors to saddle up and hit the trail with genuine bow-legged cowboys (spitting chewing tobacco is optional). Close to 100 working ranches welcome guests. There are a number of ranches in the San Antonio area, and of course the West Texas plains have more than their share. A complete list of ranches, with contact

information and other details, is available on the Texas Tourism website at **www.traveltex.com**.

**FISHING & HUNTING** Texans love fishing and hunting, and you'd be hard-pressed to find an area of the state without a popular fishing hole or nearby hunting location. The lakes of East Texas are especially good fishing spots, and the San Angelo area offers excellent fishing and hunting opportunities (see chapters 6 and 10, respectively). Gulf Coast towns such as Rockport, Corpus Christi, and South Padre Island have dozens of fishing boats available for bay and deep-sea fishing (see chapter 7). Hunting for birds, white-tailed deer, and even javelina is popular in many areas, including West Texas. For current license information, check with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (see above).

**FOUR-WHEELING** Visitors to Texas who brought along a street-legal 4×4 will find miles of beach to explore at Padre Island National Seashore (see chapter 7).

**GOLF** Texas is one of the better golfing destinations in the U.S., with more than 900 golf courses that offer plenty of challenges and a wide variety of terrain. The best courses are near major cities such as Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and Austin, but even out in the plains you're likely to stumble across an oasis of well-manicured green with a row of golf carts awaiting your tee time. Among top golfing destinations in Texas is the **Four Seasons Resort and Club at Las Colinas** (p. 93), in the Dallas–Forth Worth area, with two challenging courses, more trees than you can count, and a beautiful lake. In Houston (and with another course in the Dallas–Fort Worth area), **Tour 18** does a splendid job of capturing the feel and even look of some of the greatest and best-known golf holes in the country (p. 112 and 199).

**HIKING** There are plenty of hiking trails in Texas, including those at the numerous state parks. Perhaps the most scenic trails are in the Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains national parks—it's especially hard to beat the spectacular beauty of a fall hike in McKittrick Canyon at Guadalupe Mountains National Park (see chapter 11). Also very attractive are the hiking trails at Palo Duro Canyon State Park in the Panhandle Plains (see chapter 12). Hikers need to be prepared, though; take plenty of water when hiking in the desert, watch for poisonous snakes and insects most everywhere, and use mosquito repellent in the Gulf Coast area.

**WATERSPORTS** Swimming and waterskiing are practically year-round activities along the Gulf Coast and at Amistad National Recreation Area in West Texas (see chapters 7 and 10). The many lakes around the state—especially in East Texas and the Hill Country around San Antonio—also offer ample opportunity for a variety of watersports, especially canoeing and powerboating. In Austin, a highlight is swimming at the natural springs pool called Barton Springs, a revered local favorite. Rafters usually head to the Rio Grande near Big Bend National Park, where they can float downstream on their own or go with one of the local rafting companies (see chapter 11). For beachcombing, try Padre Island National Seashore (see chapter 7).



## 13 PLANNING YOUR TRIP ONLINE

### SURFING FOR AIRFARE

The most popular online travel agencies are **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com, www.travelocity.co.uk, or www.travelocity.ca), **Expedia** (www.expedia.com, www.expedia.co.uk, or www.expedia.ca), and **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com).

In addition, most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. Other helpful websites for booking airline tickets online include

- www.biddingfortravel.com
- www.cheapflights.com
- www.hotwire.com
- www.kayak.com
- www.lastminutetravel.com
- www.opodo.co.uk
- www.priceline.com
- www.sidestep.com
- www.site59.com
- www.smartertravel.com

## SURFING FOR HOTELS

In addition to **Travelocity, Expedia, Orbitz, Priceline,** and **Hotwire** (see above), the following websites will help you with booking hotel rooms online.

- www.hotels.com
- www.quickbook.com
- www.travelaxe.net
- www.travelweb.com
- www.tripadvisor.com

It's a good idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online booking transaction.

## SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline and Hotwire work well for rental cars, too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the differences between Hertz, Avis, and Budget are negligible.

## TRAVEL BLOGS & TRAVELOGUES

The ever-expanding blogosphere is filled with blogs on things great and public as well as obscure and personal, and weblogs originating in Texas are no exception. To read a few blogs about Texas, have a look at the directory of Texas-related blogs found at www.technorati.com/blogs/Texas and http://dir.blogflux.com/state/texas.html. Unsurprisingly, you'll find several blogs dedicated to Texas football and real estate, but you'll also find one dedicated to the "musings of a real Texas cowgirl" (http://realtexascowgirl.blogspot.com) and another, "Grits for Breakfast" (http://gritsforbreakfast.blogspot.com), that investigates the murky world of Texas justice.

## OTHER TRAVEL-RELATED BLOGS

- www.gridskipper.com
- www.salon.com/wanderlust
- www.travelblog.com
- www.travelblog.org
- www.worldhum.com
- www.writtenroad.com

# 14 STAYING CONNECTED

## TELEPHONES

Generally, hotel surcharges on long-distance and local calls are astronomical, so you're better off using your **cellphone** or a **public pay telephone.** Most long-distance and international calls can be dialed directly from any phone. **For calls within the United States and to Canada,** dial 1 followed by the area code and the seven-digit number. **For international calls,** dial 011 followed by the country code, the city code, and the number you are calling.

Calls to area codes **800, 888, 877,** and **866** are toll-free. However, calls to area codes **700** and **900** (chat lines, bulletin boards, "dating" services, and so on) can

be very expensive—usually a charge of 95¢ to $3 or more per minute, and they sometimes have minimum charges that can run as high as $15 or more.

For **reversed-charge or collect calls,** and for person-to-person calls, dial the number 0 and then the area code and number; an operator will come on the line, and you should specify whether you are calling collect, person-to-person, or both. If your operator-assisted call is international, ask for the overseas operator.

For **local directory assistance** ("information"), dial 411; for long-distance information, dial 1, then the appropriate area code and 555-1212.

## CELLPHONES

Just because your cellphone works at home doesn't mean it'll work everywhere in the U.S. (thanks to our nation's fragmented cellphone system). It's a good bet that your phone will work in major cities, but take a look at your wireless company's coverage map on its website before heading out; T-Mobile, Sprint, and Nextel are particularly weak in rural areas. If you need to stay in touch at a destination where you know your phone won't work, **rent** a phone that does from **InTouch USA** (✆ **800/872-7626;** www.intouchglobal.com) or a rental-car location, but beware: You'll pay $1 a minute or more for airtime.

If you're venturing deep into national parks, you may want to consider renting a **satellite phone** ("satphone"). It's different from a cellphone in that it connects to satellites rather than ground-based towers. Unfortunately, you'll pay at least $2 per minute to use the phone, and it works only where you can see the horizon (that is, usually not indoors). In North America, you can rent Iridium satellite phones from **RoadPost** (www.roadpost.com; ✆ **888/290-1606** or 905/272-5665). InTouch USA (see above) offers a wider range of satphones but at higher rates.

If you're not from the U.S., you'll be appalled at the poor reach of the **GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) wireless network,** which is used by much of the rest of the world. Your phone will probably work in most major U.S. cities; it definitely won't work in many rural areas. To see where GSM phones work in the U.S., check out www.t-mobile.com/coverage. And you may or may not be able to send SMS (text messaging) home.

## VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL (VOIP)

If you have Web access while traveling, consider a broadband-based telephone service (in technical terms, **Voice over Internet protocol,** or **VoIP**) such as Skype (www.skype.com) or Vonage (www.vonage.com), which allow you to make free international calls from your laptop or in a cybercafe. Neither service requires the people you're calling to also have that service (though there are fees if they do not). Check the websites for details.

## INTERNET & E-MAIL

### With Your Own Computer

To find public Wi-Fi hot spots at your destination, go to **www.jiwire.com**; its Hotspot Finder holds the world's largest directory of public wireless hot spots.

### Without Your Own Computer

Most major airports have **Internet kiosks** that provide basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices. Check out copy shops like **Kinko's** (FedEx Kinko's), which offers computer stations with fully loaded software (as well as Wi-Fi).

For help locating cybercafes and other establishments where you can get on the Internet, see "Internet Access" in this book's appendix.

# 15 TIPS ON ACCOMMODATIONS

Texas offers a v ariety of lodging options, from typical American chain motels to luxury hotels, historic hotels and bed-and-breakfast inns, and some pleasant and inexpensive mom-and-pop independent motels, cabins, and ranch-style r esorts. To make your lodging an integral part of your Texas experience, w e r ecommend choosing a historic pr operty wher e av ailable. There ar e quite a fe w historic bed-and-breakfast inns discussed in the follo wing pages, and, especially when y ou take into consideration the wonder ful br eakfasts prepared at most of them, the rates ar e fairly r easonable. Why spend $80 for a boring motel r oom and then another $10 to $15 for br eakfast when for just a bit more you can instead sleep in a handsome inn, decorated with antiques, and be served a delightful home-cooked br eakfast?

For tips on sur fing for hotel deals online, visit Frommers.com.

4

# Suggested Itineraries in Texas

When Texas became a state in 1845, the relevant legislation included a clause allowing it to split into up to five distinct states if the state legislature approved it. Likewise, planning a Texas road trip can be something like planning a road trip across five states. El Paso is closer to Tucson, Arizona (319 miles away), than it is to Dallas (634 miles away). There is a lot of ground to cover: big cities; beautiful, wide-open spaces; and miles and miles of highway in between. With all of the acreage, it's important to not stretch yourself too thin. It's easy to spend too much time behind the wheel in Texas. As always, tailor your itinerary to your interests. If you like cowboy culture, Fort Worth and Amarillo might be focal points; hikers and paddlers will want to beeline to Big Bend National Park; city slickers might head to Dallas and Houston; and music lovers should flock to Austin. During your time on the Texas road, take the opportunity to explore places off the beaten path, and get out and gander at those wide-open spaces. This big state has a lot to offer, so take advantage of as much as you can.

## 1 THE REGIONS IN BRIEF

You can plan your trip to Texas in a couple of ways. If you're interested in a particular activity, such as birding, you might choose two or three locations and divide your time among them. Conversely, you could first select a destination, such as one of the state's major cities or national parks, and then decide what to do while you're there.

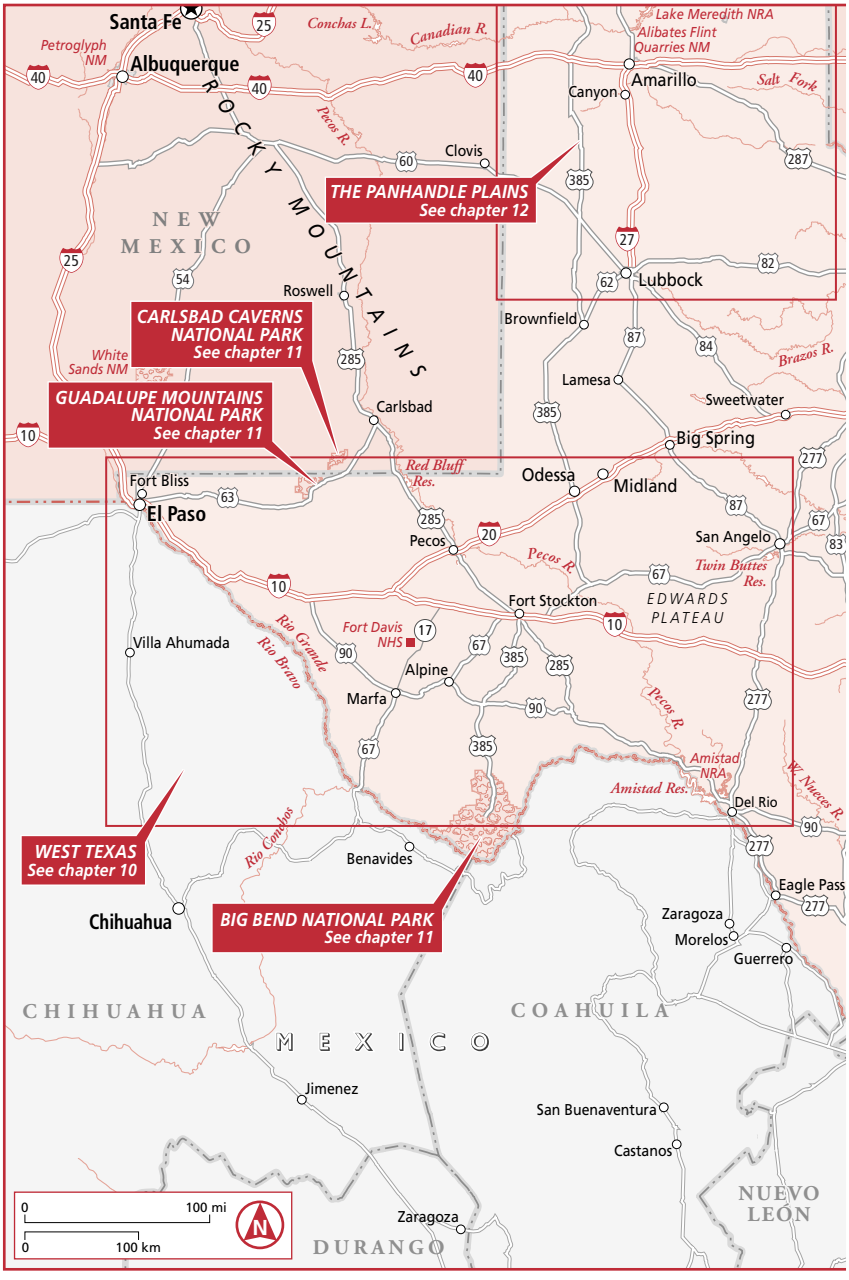
This book is organized geographically, and because this is such a large state, many visitors will limit their Texas vacation to one or two regions. We've summarized our coverage of the state to help you decide what kind of Texas experience you want to have.

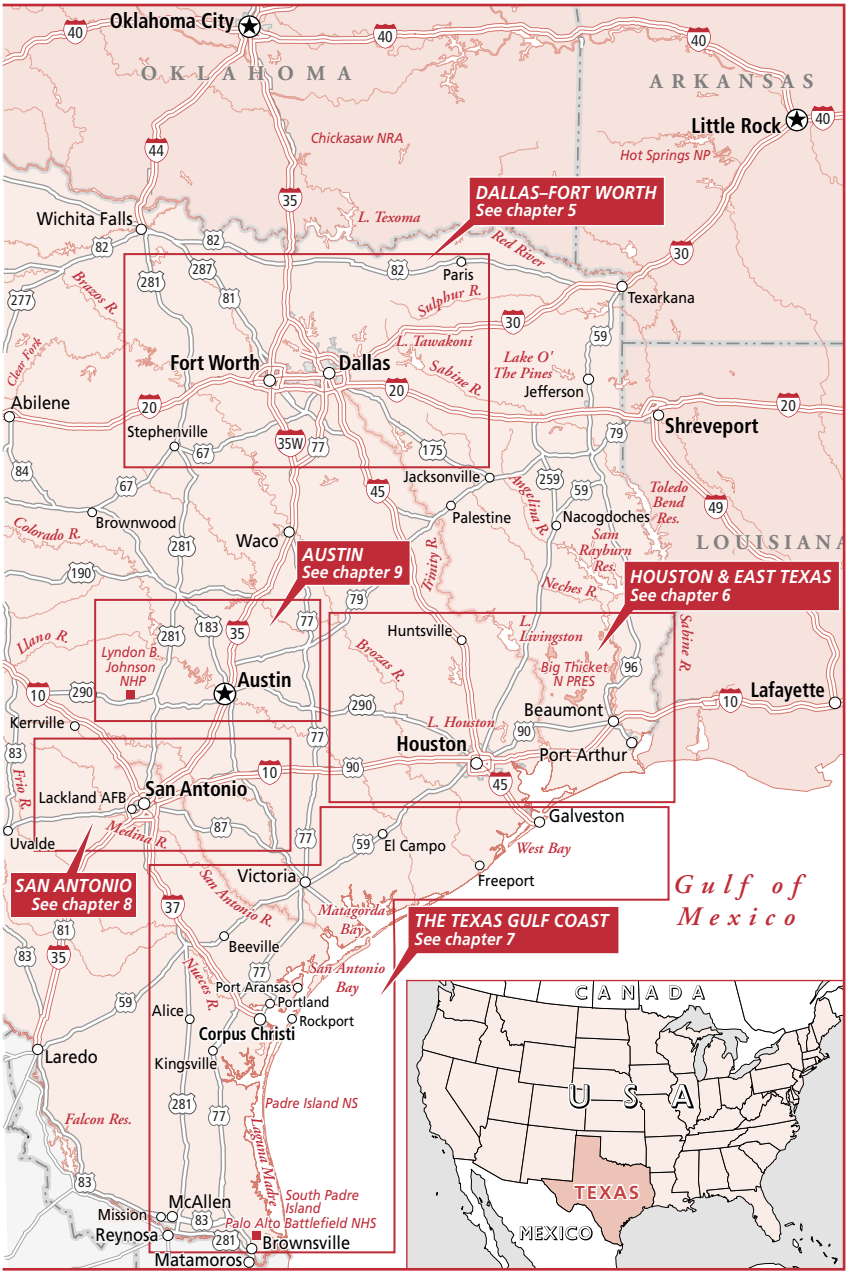
**THE DALLAS–FORT WORTH METROPLEX** Made famous by both a TV show about a Texas oil family and a football team, and infamous by the assassination of JFK, Dallas is a center of commerce, home to headquarters for numerous banking, insurance, and other businesses. Big D, as it's known to locals, is one of the most sophisticated cities in Texas, with excellent restaurants, glitzy shopping, swank hotels, and a continually expanding arts scene. Dallas's unpretentious sister, Fort Worth, is equal parts Old West and "Museum Capital of the Southwest." Longhorns still rumble through the Stockyards National Historic District, while the city attracts art lovers to its top-notch museums. Both cities make good bases for outdoor recreation, children's activities, and professional sports outings; the city of Arlington, sandwiched between Dallas and Fort Worth, is home to several theme parks and the Texas Rangers baseball team.

**HOUSTON & EAST TEXAS** The state's largest city (and the fourth-most-populous city in the United States), Houston is the heart of the nation's oil and gas industry. Although not considered a primary tourist destination, Houston offers an abundance

# The Regions in Brief






Oklahoma City
OKLAHOMA
ARKANSAS
Little Rock
Hot Springs NP
Chickasaw NRA
DALLAS–FORT WORTH
See chapter 5
L. Texoma
Red River
Wichita Falls
Paris
Texarkana
Brazos R.
Sulphur R.
Clear Fork
Fort Worth
Dallas
L. Tawakoni
Sabine R.
Lake O' The Pines
Jefferson
Abilene
Stephenville
Shreveport
Jacksonville
Angelina R.
Toledo Bend Res.
Brownwood
Palestine
Nacogdoches
Colorado R.
Waco
Trinity R.
Sam Rayburn Res.
LOUISIANA
AUSTIN
See chapter 9
Neches R.
HOUSTON & EAST TEXAS
See chapter 6
Llano R.
Lyndon B. Johnson NHP
Austin
Huntsville
L. Livingston
Big Thicket N PRES
Sabine R.
Brazos R.
Lafayette
Kerrville
Beaumont
L. Houston
Houston
Port Arthur
Frio R.
Lackland AFB
San Antonio
Galveston
Medina R.
Uvalde
El Campo
West Bay
Victoria
Freeport
Gulf of Mexico
SAN ANTONIO
See chapter 8
San Antonio R.
Matagorda Bay
THE TEXAS GULF COAST
See chapter 7
Beeville
San Antonio Bay
Nueces R.
Port Aransas
Portland
Rockport
Alice
Corpus Christi
Laredo
Kingsville
Padre Island NS
Falcon Res.
Laguna Madre
South Padre Island
McAllen
Mission
Palo Alto Battlefield NHS
Reynosa
Brownsville
Matamoros
CANADA
U S A
TEXAS
MEXICO

of attractions, including several excellent museums, performing arts such as the city's outstanding symphony orchestra, and a variety of outdoor activities. NASA's Johnson Space Center made Houston famous and is the city's most popular attraction. Nearby Galveston combines small-town easiness with a good mix of museums and children's activities, plus beaches that draw hordes of springbreakers and families throughout the warm months. East Texas, along the Louisiana border, is a prime destination for anglers, boaters, and other outdoor recreationists.

**THE TEXAS GULF COAST** A world removed from the rest of the state, the coastal areas fronting the Gulf of Mexico feature beach activities as well as good boating and even some surfing (okay, it's no Hawaii, but you *can* surf here). The Texas Gulf Coast is among the nation's top bird-watching regions, and also offers superb fishing. You'll also find a handful of good museums and an active art scene.

**SAN ANTONIO** The delightful, Latin-inflected city of San Antonio hosts the most famous historic site in Texas: the Alamo, where in 1836 Davy Crockett and about 187 other Texas freedom fighters died at the hands of the much larger Mexican army. San Antonio also offers numerous other historic sites, a charming River Walk, fine cultural attractions, and a madcap schedule of festivals that make it a popular party spot. West and north of the city, the Texas Hill Country is one of the prettiest areas of Texas, dotted with hills (of course!), lakes, rivers, wildflowers, and picturesque small towns with authentic Texas flavor. There are numerous historic inns, antiques stores, small museums, and opportunities for watersports and other outdoor activities.

**AUSTIN** The state capital, Austin is a laid-back but sophisticated and suddenly bustling, large city with a distinct personality—a little unusual, a bit intellectual, and a lot different from other Texas cities of its size. It's a place where you'll see bumper stickers that read keep austin weird, even though it's experienced a technology-based boom and a huge influx of money and new residents from California and elsewhere across the nation. In addition to museums, historic sites, and a wide range of outdoor activities, you'll find the best nightlife in the state, with live music practically everywhere, any night of the week—from country to blues to rock to swing. To the west, the Hill Country is easily accessible via day trips.

**WEST TEXAS** Though Texas is largely urban, if you grew up watching TV and movie Westerns, you'd be more likely to believe the plains of West Texas are the real Texas, a land of dusty roads, weathered cowboys, and huge cattle ranches. Although the shootouts are now staged and the cattle drives are by truck and rail, this region retains much of the small-town Old West flavor, and even the region's biggest city, El Paso, is in many ways just an overgrown cow town. The area's history comes alive at numerous museums and historic sites, such as the combination courtroom and saloon used in the late 1800s by Judge Roy Bean, the self-styled "Law West of the Pecos." West Texas also has the 67,000-acre Lake Amistad, a national recreation area along the U.S.–Mexico border.

**BIG BEND & GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARKS** Among America's lesser-visited national parks, Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains contain rugged mountain scenery the likes of which is found nowhere else in Texas, or even in surrounding states. There are spectacular and inspiring views from dizzying peaks, as well as hiking, rafting, and other outdoor activities. And Carlsbad Caverns National Park is just over the state line in New Mexico, an easy side trip for those visiting Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

**THE PANHANDLE PLAINS** A mix of terrain and v aried experiences awaits visitors to this vast, rugged region that occupies the northern r eaches of Texas. Close to an entire day's drive from the coast, here you'll find small-to wn charm, good museums, fascinating historic sites, and one of the most outrageous steakhouses in Texas. The main cities—just big to wns, actually—ar e Amarillo and Lubbock, each offering comfortable lodging and good eats. The region has plenty to do and see, with waterspor ts on Lake M eredith N ational R ecreation Area, and hiking, horseback riding, and some of the ar ea's most spectacular scener y at P alo D uro Cany on S tate P ark. This is also home to a monument to r ock-'n'-roll pioneer B uddy H olly and a display of old Cadillacs, noses buried in the gr ound with their unmistakable fins pointed skyward.

## 2 TEXAS IN 1 WEEK

This r oute brings y ou to the four major metr o ar eas in Texas—Dallas–Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston—while diverting for a Gulf Coast getaway on Padre Island National Seashore.

### Day ❶: Arrive in Dallas–Fort Worth

The D allas–Fort Worth ar ea is a good starting point for any Texas trip. Rent a car if y ou don't alr eady hav e one, and pick lodging accessible to the attractions y ou want to see in either city and get y our bearings. V isit the **John F . K ennedy Memorial** (p . 102) and the **Sixth F loor Museum at D ealey P laza** ★★ (p. 103), and, if y ou have time, make an ex cursion to **Fair P ark** ★ (p. 107). After dinner at **Sonny B ryan's S mokehouse** ★ (p. 101) or another Dallas dining staple, check out **Lower Greenville**'s nightlife (p. 118).

### Day ❷: Explore Dallas–Fort Worth

Split time between the artistic highlights of Dallas and F ort Worth, hitting the Ar ts District in D allas (be sur e to visit the **Nasher Sculpture Center** ★★★ p. 105), but leav e plenty of time to r oam in F ort Worth's incomparable **Cultural D istrict** (p. 132), wher e the **Modern Art Museum of F ort Worth** ★★★ (p . 146) and **Kimbell Ar t M useum** ★★★ (p . 145) are must-sees. I n the ev ening, have dinner in the **Stockyards N ational H istoric District** ★★ before paying a visit to **Billy Bob's T exas** ★★★ (p . 152), a mega–country club , or taking in liv e music at another one of the city's many honky-tonks.

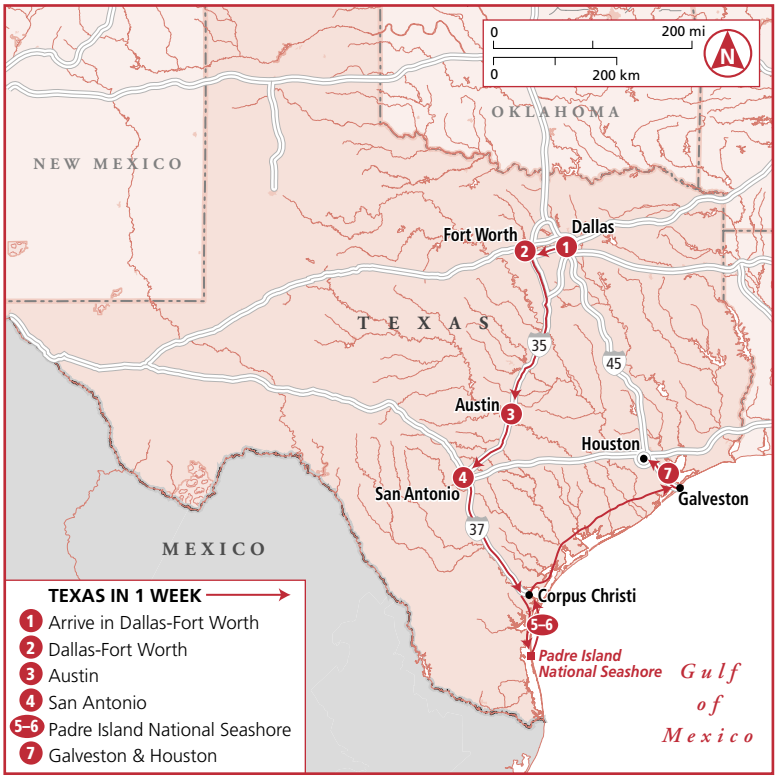
### Day ❸: Explore Austin

Get going early for the 200-mile driv e to Austin. If it's hot, head immediately to **Barton Springs Pool** ★★ (p. 329), for a dip to cool off . Visit the ne w **Blanton Museum of Ar t** ★ (p . 327) in the afternoon, then make it to the **Congress Avenue B ridge** for the sundo wn bat exodus (p . 328). H ave dinner do wntown and explor e the famed **Austin music scene** in the Warehouse D istrict, on 6th Street, on R ed River, or in S outh Austin. Stay either do wntown or on S outh Congress at the **Austin M otel** ★ (p . 313) or the **Hotel San José** ★★ (p. 313).

### Day ❹: Explore San Antonio

It's an 80-mile drive south from Austin to San Antonio. Park downtown and visit the **Alamo** ★★ (p . 281), **HemisFair P ark,** and the **San Antonio M useum of Ar t** ★★. Alternatively, y ou could spend the afternoon visiting the fiv e lesser-kno wn missions that compose the **San Antonio**

# The Best of Texas in 1 Week




**Missions National Historical Park** ★★ (p. 284). Return downtown for some time on the **River Walk** ★★★ (p. 283), culminating in dinner at one of the many restaurants in the vicinity.

### Days 5–6: Explore Padre Island National Seashore

From San Antonio, head down to Padre Island Seashore, a 180-mile drive, and take your time unwinding from the hectic urban pace of the first 4 days of the trip. Explore **Padre Island National Seashore** ★ (p. 240). Take time to wander the beach, surf, fish, swim, or simply read a book and nap in the sun. Stay in **Corpus Christi** (p. 226), or—if you are up for more driving—head farther down the Gulf Coast to **South Padre Island** (p. 245). But, as it's a 410-mile drive to Galveston, you might want to start heading north sometime in the afternoon of Day 6.

### Day 7: Explore Galveston & Houston

From Corpus Christi, it's about 150 miles to **Galveston,** where you can spend more time on the beach or delve into the city's fascinating history. Drive back east into Houston for the afternoon to visit **Space Center Houston** ★★★ (p. 192) before dining at one of Houston's many terrific eateries.

# 3 TEXAS IN 2 WEEKS

Start with the first 3 days of the preceding 1-week itinerary, then divert to West Texas and Big Bend Country for a week before working your way back to San Antonio for Day 11, and then continue with the final 3 days of the preceding 1-week itinerary before heading back home.

## Day 4: Drive to Del Rio & Explore

From San Antonio, it is only 154 miles to **Del Rio** (p. 384), so you'll have time to get a late start and spend more time in the former. Or you can get going early, take the scenic drive from Junction to Rocksprings on U.S. 377 to Del Rio, and visit **Amistad National Recreation Area** ★, the **Whitehead Memorial Museum** ★ (p. 385), or **Seminole Canyon State Park** (p. 387) in the area before checking in at the **Villa Del Rio Bed & Breakfast** ★ (p. 385) or another lodging. For dinner, head across the Rio Grande into Mexico for dinner in **Ciudad Acuña** (p. 386), one of our favorite border towns.

## Days 5–7: Explore Big Bend National Park & Vicinity

From Del Rio, drive west toward **Big Bend National Park** ★★ (p. 389). There is plenty to see along the way: You can stop at the Pecos River for a dramatic view or visit Langtry and learn a bit about Judge Roy Bean, and the **Seminole Canyon** (p. 387) is also a worthwhile diversion. Do some hiking and exploring before stopping at the **Gage Hotel** ★★ in Marathon (p. 400) for the night of Day 5. You can also drive to Terlingua or Study Butte as a base for your Big Bend excursions. Another option is camping in Big Bend National Park or staying in park limits at **Chisos Mountains Lodge** ★ (p. 399). Make plans to go on day hikes or do a rafting trip on the Rio Grande, a 2-day trip if possible. There are also interesting sights, stores, and restaurants in **Terlingua** (p. 400) and plenty of cultural history along the river in and outside of the park.

## Days 8–9: Explore Big Bend Ranch State Park & Marfa

From Big Bend, drive the Wild and Scenic River portion of FM 170 to Presidio, taking time to get out on a few hikes in **Big Bend Ranch State Park** ★★ (p. 369). From Presidio, take U.S. 67 to **Marfa** (p. 368). Stay and eat in Marfa or **Alpine** (p. 372). On Day 9, check out the **Chinati Foundation**'s ★★ (p. 369) avant-garde installations (it requires your time 10am–4pm to go on a guided tour) and downtown Marfa while the sun is up. Once it goes down, take U.S. 90 9 miles east to see **Marfa's Mystery Lights** (p. 370), or else head north to the **McDonald Observatory** ★ (p. 366) if there's a Star Party that night. If Marfa's accommodations are booked, Alpine is a great alternative, as it has some noteworthy galleries and the **Museum of the Big Bend** ★ (p. 373).

## Day 10: Explore Fort Davis & Balmorhea

Spend your final day in West Texas before heading east for the Gulf Coast exploring **Fort Davis National Historic Site** ★ (p. 366) or **Davis Mountains State Park** (p. 365). You can stay in Fort Davis, or continue—stopping at the oasis of a swimming pool at **Balmorhea State Park** ★★ (p. 368) if it's hot—and cut down on the drive to the Gulf Coast. After bunking in Balmorhea or somewhere off I-10 for the night, continue with Day 5 from the 1-week itinerary for the last 3 days of your trip.

# The Best of Texas in 2 Weeks

## 4 TEXAS FOR FAMILIES

Texas is a good choice for a family vacation, but because of its sheer size, it's best to pare back the car time from your itinerary. The major cities have plenty of kid-friendly attractions and pursuits, so adjust your time in each place accordingly: Families with budding astronauts will want to dedicate a whole day to S pace Center H ouston; other families might want to spend more time in the attraction-packed suburb of Arlington.

### Day 1: Arrive in Dallas

As w e mentioned abo ve in the 1-w eek itinerary, Dallas is a good star ting point for any Texas trip . R ent a car if y ou don't already have one, and pick lodging accessible to the attractions y ou want to see in either city and get your bearings. In Dallas, visit the **Old C ity P ark** ★ (p . 110) and make an excursion to **Fair Park** ★ (p. 107). Eat at **Fireside P ies** ★ (p. 100) or **Sonny Bryan's S mokehouse** ★ (p . 101), both family-friendly mainstays in Big D.

## Day 2: Explore Arlington & Fort Worth

**Arlington** (p. 120) is a top Texas family destination, located roughly midway between Dallas and Fort Worth. The suburb is home to such attractions as **Six Flags Over Texas** (p. 122) and the **Legends of the Game Baseball Museum** ★ at the home stadium of the Texas Rangers (p. 121). You can combine the day with some time in Fort Worth, or bypass Arlington altogether if your kids are old enough to appreciate the fantastic art museums in Fort Worth. The **Cowtown Cattlepen Maze** (p. 141) and the **Fort Worth Zoo** ★★★ are good bets for kids of all ages. That night, stay in Fort Worth after dinner at **Joe T. Garcia's Mexican Dishes** (p. 135).

## Days 3–4: Explore Houston

Get a good start on your drive to Houston, because there is plenty to see and do in the 2 days you'll spend there: **Space Center Houston** ★★★ (p. 192), the **Children's Museum of Houston** ★★ (p. 193), the **Orange Show** ★★ (p. 192), the **Downtown Aquarium** (p. 190), the **Kemah Boardwalk** (p. 192), and the **Museum of Health & Medical Science** ★★★ (p. 195) are all worthy destinations. **Lupe Tortilla** (p. 187) is a reliable kid-friendly restaurant in town.

### Days 5–6: Explore the Gulf Coast & Padre Island National Seashore

Drive down the Gulf Coast from Houston to Corpus Christi and spend time at **Padre Island National Seashore** ★ (p. 240), a great spot to spend a couple of days and burn off some steam swimming, fishing, flying kites, and other wise playing in the surf and sun.

### Day 7: Explore Austin or San Antonio

To cap off your Texas family vacation, take your pick of the **Alamo** ★★ (p. 281) and **HemisFair Park** (p. 286) in San Antonio or **Zilker Park** ★ (p. 332), the **Texas State Capitol** ★★ (p. 328), and the **Austin Children's Museum** ★★ (p. 333) in Austin. If you can extend your trip by a few days, you can do both cities better justice.

## 5 EXPLORING THE TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER

A political boundary and one of the most recognizable lines on a Texas map—the dual curves of the Rio Grande (known in Mexico as the Rio Bravo)—is a fascinating route through two countries and cultures. You'll finish out the itinerary in San Antonio, a city that embodies and embraces the diversity and coexistence of the cultures.

### Day 1: Arrive in El Paso

The largest metro area on any border in the world, this booming community of nearly four million people on both sides of the river wears its many layers of history on its sleeves: There are 17th-century Spanish missions, Victorian downtown storefronts, skyscrapers, suburban strip malls, factories, and poor Mexican neighborhoods. Base yourself in downtown El Paso, if you want easy access to cross into **Juárez** by foot, or by the airport, where you'll find more numerous accommodations options. The **L&J Café** ★★ (p. 361) is a great choice for dinner.

### Day 2: Explore El Paso & Ciudad Juárez

In El Paso, we recommend the **El Paso Museum of Art** ★★ (p. 354), **San Jacinto Plaza**, and the **El Paso Mission Trail** ★ (p. 353). Cross into **Juárez** (p. 363) on foot in the afternoon and shop the city markets, and then check out the historic plaza and 1668 mission before retreating to the **Kentucky Club** (p. 365)—the alleged birthplace of the margarita—and **Nuevo Martino** ★ (p. 364) for dinner.

### Day 3: Explore Candelaria en route to Big Bend National Park

Start the day with breakfast at the **H&H Car Wash and Coffee Shop** ★ (p. 361). From El Paso, take I-10 and U.S. 90 back east to Marfa, then U.S. 67 to Presidio before diverting back northeast along the border on FM 170. The drive to **Candelaria** is scenic and has little traffic. Backtrack through Presidio en route to stay for the night in the Big Bend area. Grab dinner at the **Starlight Theatre** ★★ (p. 400).

### Days 4–5: Big Bend National Park

Make a point of exploring the river canyons in Big Bend, and take a few hikes in the park. Camp or stay at **Chisos Mountains Lodge** ★ (p. 399) at night or stay in one of the gateway towns. (Unfortunately, there are no official crossings into Mexico in the vicinity and once-traditional unofficial crossings for dinner are now prosecuted.) If time permits, explore the

adjacent Big Bend Ranch State Park. If you have more time for this trip, this is a great place to spend several days, perhaps taking a multiday rafting or canoeing trip on the river border itself.

### Day 6: Del Rio

From Big Bend, get back on U.S. 90 and continue east to **Del Rio** (p. 384). En route, visit **Amistad National Recreation Area** ★ (a joint U.S.–Mexico reservoir on the Rio Grande; p. 386) and the Pecos River before checking in at the **Villa Del Rio Bed & Breakfast** ★ (p. 385) or another lodging. Have dinner in **Ciudad Acuña** (p. 386), a colorful Mexican border town.

### Day 7: San Antonio

From Del Rio head east on U.S. 90 about 150 miles for San Antonio. Spend the day ambling the **River Walk** ★★★ (p. 283), enjoying some Mexican food, shopping the import stalls at **Market Square** ★ (p. 282), or taking a tour of one of the famous local attractions such as the **Alamo** ★★ (p. 281) or the **San Antonio Missions National Historical Park** ★★ (p. 284).

5

# Dallas–Fort Worth

*by Neil Edward Schlecht*

North Texas's two biggest cities, Dallas and Fort Worth, are often referred to as "DFW"—or, in a term that could only have been devised by so-called marketing geniuses, the "Metroplex"—as though they were closely intertwined twin cities. While unrelenting development has filled the flat land gaps between them and created a greater population of some four million (and a ranking in the top five in the country for urban sprawl), the two cities remain 30 miles and, perhaps more important, worlds apart culturally. Slick and glitzy Dallas, home of the NFL's Cowboys, "America's Team," thrives on an identity of banking and big business; it's "where the East peters out," in the words of Will Rogers. Fort Worth, the "Cowtown" of the legendary cattle drives and now the cultural capital of North Texas, has long identified itself quite differently: where the West begins. Much more laid-back than Dallas, Fort Worth might even be considered a bit pokey, were it not for its surprising roster of world-class museums, progressive civic-mindedness, good-natured downtown nightlife, and thriving Western character.

## 1 ORIENTATION

### ARRIVING

#### By Plane

**DALLAS/FORT WORTH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT** Most visitors will arrive via **DFW Airport** (✆ **972/574-6000;** www.dfwairport.com), located midway between the two cities and one of the largest in the nation. The airport, the world's third busiest and larger than the island of Manhattan (take that, New York!), has four terminals connected by a "people mover." **DFW Airport Visitor Information** (✆ **972/574-3694**) provides hotel, sightseeing, and transportation information, and the **Airport Assistance Center** (✆ **972/574-4420**) offers crisis counseling, foreign language assistance, and car seat rental. Currency exchange booths and ATMs are in terminals A, B, D (International, the newest terminal), and E. All the major car-rental companies have representatives here (though note that if you're returning a car, the rental terminal is a good 5 miles away, so allow extra time before your departure). Transportation between terminals is quick and easy on Skylink, the world's largest airport train.

Ground transportation to Dallas, Fort Worth, or the surrounding area is by **Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)** bus, airport shuttle, private car, charter limo, courtesy car, or taxi. Many hotels offer courtesy transportation to and from the airport; check to see if yours does. Transport by bus is the cheapest option, but the best value is taking the airport shuttle. For more about ground transportation, call ✆ **972/574-5878.**

**DART** (✆ **214/979-1111;** www.dart.org) offers two means of travel between DFW Airport and downtown Dallas: the **Trinity Railway Express (TRE)** and **DART Express**

**Route 202.** Passenger terminals at DFW Airport are served by two DART shuttles serving terminals A and C and terminals B and E; both operate from CentrePort/DFW Airport Station. Express Bus 202 departs from the DFW Airport ground transportation level in terminals A and E and travels directly to the West Transfer Center in downtown Dallas. The TRE operates Monday through Saturday (***Note:*** not on Sun); the 202 Express Bus runs hourly, 7 days a week, from 6am to 11pm. Single-ride fares on either are $2.50. An Express 1-day pass is available for $5 and is good for unlimited rides on DART and the T (including your return trip) until 3am the next day. For more information, call ✆ **214/979-1111** or 877/657-0146 or visit www.trinityrailwayexpress.org.

Another convenient mode of transportation to and from the airport is **Super Shuttle DFW** (✆ **800/BLUE-VAN** [258-3826] or 817/329-2000; www.supershuttle.com), which can be reached 24 hours a day. A typical fare to downtown Dallas is $26 to $32, to Fort Worth $17 to $26. The **Yellow Checker Shuttle** (✆ **817/267-5150;** www.yellowcheckershuttle.com) operates shuttle services between DFW and Fort Worth; to or from the Airporter Park & Ride lot at 1000 E. Weatherford St. in downtown Fort Worth is $12, and to downtown hotels, $15.

Taxis are on hand at airport arrival gates. You can also make airport transportation reservations by calling **Yellow Checker** (✆ **214/426-6262** or 817/426-6262) or **Cowboy Cab** (✆ **214/428-0202**). If you prefer limousine service, try **ExecuCar** (✆ **800/410-4444**), **Agency Limousine** (✆ **800/277-LIMO** [277-5466] or 817/284-7575), or **DFW Towncars** (✆ **214/956-1880**). The taxi fare to downtown Dallas is $40, downtown Fort Worth, $43; limo service is about $55 and $60, respectively.

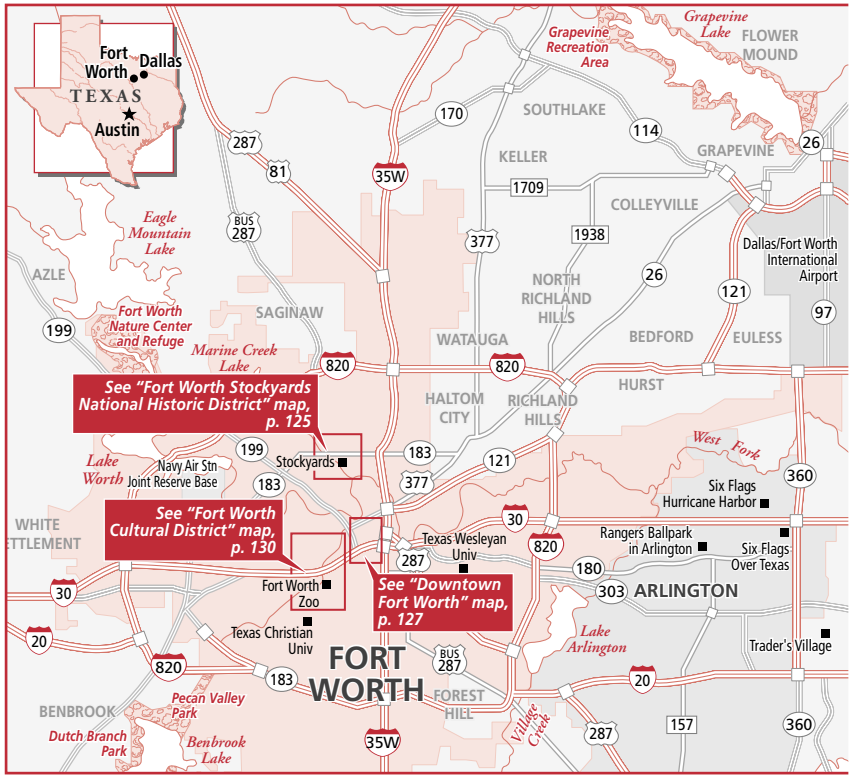
**Driving from DFW Airport** International Parkway connects directly to major freeways serving both Dallas and Fort Worth (Hwy. 114 and 635 north, and 183 and 360 south). Signs clearly indicate the route; each city is 18 miles from the airport. Despite that seemingly short distance, the drive to downtown Dallas or Fort Worth in peak hours takes about an hour.

**LOVE FIELD** Love Field (✆ **214/670-6073;** www.dallas-lovefield.com) is just 7 miles from downtown Dallas. After DFW Airport was built, Love Field became primarily a private plane and cargo airport for DHL and Federal Express. Southwest Airlines has continued to operate out of it, and recently it has been resurrected as a commercial airport, with Delta and Continental Express building or revamping terminals. While you're hanging around in the Southwest terminal, drop in on the **Frontiers of Flight Museum** (✆ **214/350-3600**), open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission costs $2 for adults, $1 for children 11 and under.

All major car-rental companies have locations here. The same ground transportation services for DFW Airport also travel to Love Field. A taxi downtown costs about $18; the Super Shuttle from downtown Dallas is $26, $6 for each additional passenger.

## By Car

You'll almost surely need a car to get around Dallas–Fort Worth (unless you stick to the downtown areas), so it's not a bad idea to arrive in one. The major roads into Dallas are **I-635** (better known as LBJ Fwy.), which goes from DFW Airport east to Dallas; **I-20,** which joins I-635 and heads west to Fort Worth; **I-35,** north-south from the border towns in South Texas, through San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas, and all the way to Oklahoma; and **U.S. 75** (the Central Expwy.), which runs north-south from downtown Dallas to the northern suburbs. From Houston, the drive to Dallas (or Fort Worth) is about 5 hours; from Austin, 4 hours. Dallas is about an hour from Fort Worth.



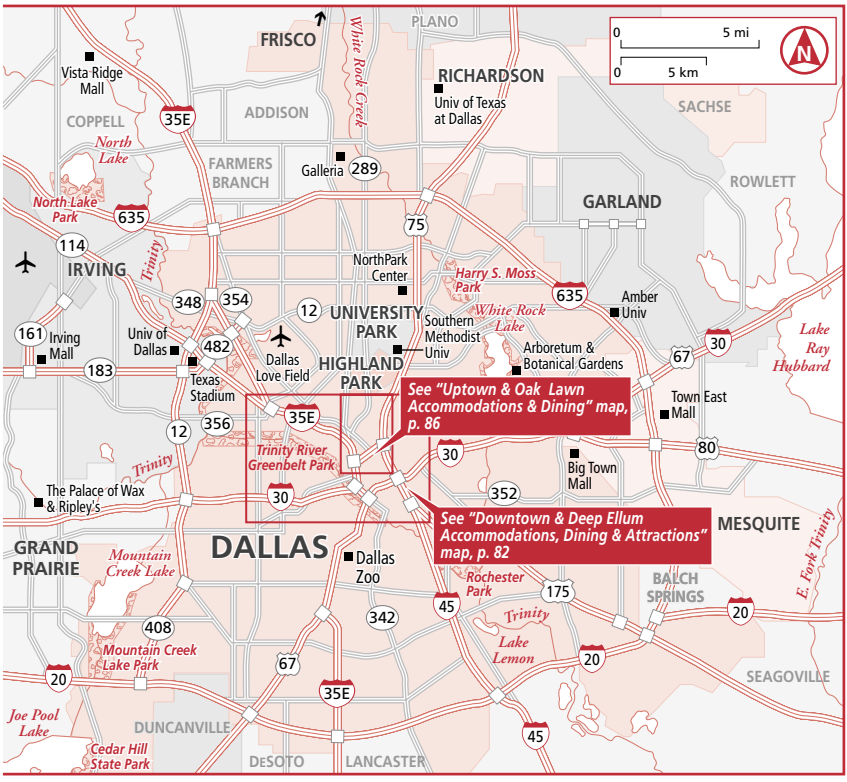

## By Train

Amtrak's Texas Eagle serves Dallas's **Union Station,** 400 S. Houston St. (✆ **214/653-1101**), and Fort Worth's **Intermodal Transportation Center (IT C)** in the southeast corner of the city at 1001 Jones St. and 9th Street (✆ **817/332-2931**). Trains arrive from Chicago, St. Louis, Little Rock, San Antonio, and Los Angeles; Heartland Flyer trains serve Oklahoma City and Fort Worth. For more information and reservations, contact Amtrak at ✆ **800/USA-RAIL** (872-7245) or visit www.amtrak.com or www.texaseagle.com.

The **Trinity Railway Express (TRE)** travels back and forth between Dallas and Fort Worth (day pass, $5); for more information, call ✆ **214/979-1111** or 817/215-8600 (www.trinityrailwayexpress.org).

## 2 DALLAS ★

Known to locals as simply "Big D," this North Texas upstart certainly doesn't lack for confidence. The indoctrination starts early. I grew up in North Dallas, and the refrain






that all school kids had to parr ot was fr om a little ditty that w ent "B ig D, little a, double-l, a-s." D allasites, like most Texans who ar e giv en to hyperbole when talking about their state, are proud to declare that their city is nicknamed "Big D" because, well, everything's bigger and better in D allas.

Americans and people ar ound the world hav e grown up with images of D allas—some big, some not necessarily better. A sniper gunned do wn President John F. Kennedy as his motorcade snaked thr ough do wntown D allas in 1963; while the nation mourned, a local nightclub o wner mur dered the pr esumed assassin, Lee H arvey O swald, right under the noses of local police. The Dallas Cowboys, a football club whose suppor ters had the audacity to call it "America's Team," won five Super Bowls and made scantily clad cheerleaders with big hair and big boobs a r equired accesso r y in pr ofessional spor ts. Bonnie and Clyde began their wanton spr ee of lawlessness in D allas. J.R. E wing presided over an oil empire in the TV soap opera *Dallas,* and pr opagated an image of tough-talking businessmen who wor e cowboy boots with their pinstriped suits and had oil rigs pumping in the backyard. The irascible H. R oss Perot—remember him?—made a for tune in technology and thought he deserved to run the country. His pop-culture place has now been taken by Mark Cuban, high-tech billionaire and owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks.

Dallas has come to symbolize the kind of place where such larger-than-life characters live out the American dream, even if their versions are slightly skewed. Big D is about dreaming big, so the city, not much more than 400 square miles of flat prairie land broken up by shiny skyscrapers and soaring suburban homes, adopts all things big. Big cars. Big hair. Big belt buckles. Big attitude.

With 1.2 million inhabitants, Dallas is only the third-largest city in Texas, though it ranks number nine in the United States. Flat and featureless, it has little in the way of natural gifts or historical precedents that might have predicted its growth. Yet the city grew from a little Republic of Texas pioneer outpost in the mid–19th century into a major center for banking, finance, and oil. It is a largely conservative city, and its residents' biggest passions seem to be making money and spending it, often ostentatiously. In the city that spawned Neiman Marcus, shopping is a religion, and megamalls fan out in every direction, part of an endless commercial sprawl. Dallasites are also fiercely passionate about big-time sports, and not just the Cowboys. Just about every professional sports league has a franchise in Dallas, and there's also rodeo and the Texas Motor Speedway. This is a place where the top high-school football teams routinely sell out playing fields that seat 20,000 and schedule their playoff games in Texas Stadium, home of the Cowboys, to accommodate a fan base that reaches far beyond parents and teachers. Dallas is also a place where Southern Baptist churches pack in nearly as many for Sunday services, and for the most part conservative politics reign supreme (the presidential library of No. 43, George W. Bush, will be located at Dallas's top university, Southern Methodist University [SMU], the alma mater of his wife, Laura Bush).

Dallas ranks as the top business and leisure destination in Texas (and the second-most-popular convention site in the country). The city has grown much more cosmopolitan in recent years, even though it's always been amazing to me how quickly newcomers from all over assimilate and begin to think Texan. Dallas has tried very hard to establish a cultural life on a par with business opportunities, and a recent burst of arts philanthropy—and hiring virtually every renowned international architect in the book to build up the Arts District—is doing much to catapult Dallas into the big leagues. Slick and newly sophisticated Dallas has plenty to entertain visitors, many of whom come on business and stay around to play a bit: great hotels, eclectic restaurants, a thriving nightlife, and even a pretty robust alternative music scene. And, lest we forget, the enduring appeal of nonstop shopping.



## ESSENTIALS

### Visitor Information

Besides the DFW Airport Visitor Information (see above), there is a visitor information outlet at the **Old Red Courthouse** in downtown Dallas (at the junction of Houston, Main, and Commerce sts.; ✆ **214/571-1301,** 24-hr. hot line; Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat–Sun 9am–5pm). It has Internet terminals and touch-screen computer information kiosks. Before your travels, you might want to visit the website of the **Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau** at www.dallascvb.com or www.visitdallas.com.

To get an immediate handle on what's happening in Dallas, check out the *Dallas Morning News* "Weekend Guide" (www.guidelive.com) or *Dallas Observer* (www.dallasobserver.com), a free weekly paper with arts, entertainment, and dining information.

### City Layout

Dallas is extremely spread out, covering nearly 400 square miles. Traditionally, most people have worked in the downtown central business district and commuted to their

homes in residential districts primarily north and east (but also south and west) of the city. New business attracted to the city has resulted in many more offices in outlying areas, particularly the corridor from Richardson to Plano, north of Dallas along U.S. 75 (Central Expwy.) and west of the city in Carrollton and Irving/Las Colinas.

The West End Historic District, financial center, and Arts District are all downtown, just west of Central Expressway (though Deep Ellum, also part of downtown, is on the east side of U.S. 75). Central, in fact, divides east and west Dallas. LBJ Freeway, or I-635, runs through far-north Dallas. It connects to I-20, which runs a loop south of the city. Irving, Grand Prairie, and Arlington are all due west, between Dallas and Fort Worth. I-30 leads directly west to Fort Worth.

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

In addition to the six major neighborhoods discussed below, the city is surrounded by concentric rings of ever-expanding suburbs. (I grew up in one, Richardson, and went to high school in another, Plano, which was one of the fastest-growing small cities in the United States until displaced by new juggernauts farther north, such as Frisco.) In addition to ever-bigger homes, these areas, especially north of the city, are marked by scores of megamalls, minimalls, and strip malls of chain stores and restaurants that make the new developments very difficult to distinguish from one another. New stadiums and shopping and entertainment facilities are drawing more and more people to Plano, McKinney, and Frisco.

**Downtown Dallas** This area encompasses the **Dallas Arts District,** the nexus of downtown Dallas's fine and performing arts, including the Dallas Museum of Art, Nasher Sculpture Center, Meyerson Symphony Center, Crow Collection of Asian Art, and others; the **West End Historic District,** a former warehouse district and one of the oldest parts of the city transformed into a popular hotel, restaurant, nightlife, and shopping scene; and the core of downtown offices that extend east from **Reunion Arena** and **Dealey Plaza,** where the flagship Neiman Marcus is the sole remaining department store. Though some urban-minded professionals are finally beginning to renovate residential loft spaces, downtown Dallas remains pretty much a ghost town after 6pm (except for West End). Still, it has a number of major hotels and makes a good place to drop anchor, especially for visiting businesspeople.

**Deep Ellum** Located east of downtown and bounded by Elm, Main, Commerce, and Canton streets, is Deep Ellum. Until recently, this area was Big D's best impersonation of Austin, the live-music capital of the Southwest. Unfortunately, Deep Ellum has experienced a recent eruption of violence, gang-related and otherwise, so the nightlife scene here is not what it once was, though there are still a number of nightclubs and bars. Simultaneously ragged and chic, the former industrial district is home to alternative, blues, rock, and other music clubs interspersed with discos, honky-tonks, art galleries, furniture and secondhand shops, and upscale restaurants. During the day the area is dead, but at night and on weekends it gets pretty rowdy. The name is said to be a southern drawl pronunciation of the main street, Elm.

**Uptown & Oak Lawn** Located northeast of downtown and promoted as "Uptown," **McKinney Avenue, Knox-Henderson,** and the emerging **Victory Park** are destinations for chic restaurants, shopping meccas, and *in*

places to live (chic, modern condos defy housing slowdowns and just keep going up, as do luxury hotels). McKinney Avenue, once the site of elegant old homes, is now the center of the Dallas art gallery scene, while Knox-Henderson is split right down the middle between trendy restaurants and upscale furnishings stores. Some of the hottest shopping and nightlife options are in **West Village** in Uptown. **Victory Park,** the area around American Airlines Center, is home to hip, upscale hotels and is taking off as an entertainment enclave. **Oak Lawn, Cedar Springs,** and **Turtle Creek,** the heart of artsy and gay Dallas, are home to some of its finest hotels, restaurants, shopping, and the Dallas Theater Center, built by Frank Lloyd Wright.

**Greenville Avenue & East Dallas** The high point of Dallas nightlife, as it has been for decades, is this long strip located northeast of downtown Dallas, from LBJ Freeway south to Ross Avenue. Upper Greenville draws a slightly older and sophisticated crowd, while Lower Greenville (below Mockingbird) swims with nightclubs, bars both shabby and snooty, bohemian restaurants, vintage clothing stores, and resale furniture shops. East Dallas is home to the party district Deep Ellum, the Lakewood residential neighborhood, and old Dallas sites like the Cotton Bowl and Texas fairgrounds.

**Park Cities** The traditional haunt of the Dallas elite, Park Cities encompasses one of America's wealthiest residential districts, **Highland Park,** as well as the none-too-shabby **University Park** and the city's major university, preppy SMU, where the presidential library of George W. Bush will be located in the near future. Park Cities is located north of downtown and west of Central Expressway. Plenty of Dallasites tend to refer to the entire zone as Highland Park, if only to use the best-known district as shorthand.

**North Dallas** The northern edge of the city and southern edge of the suburbs is where the hard-core shopping begins (in places such as the Galleria, Valley View, and Prestonwood malls in Addison). It is also home to an ever-growing contingent of hotels and restaurants away from the downtown business scene.



## Getting Around

### By Public Transportation

Until recently, Dallas was a typical Southern city covering a huge area but where there wasn't a lick of public transportation. Things have really improved with the addition of **Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) buses and light rail,** whose coverage is constantly expanding out from the downtown area. Pick up a map at any visitor information center as well as most hotels and major attractions. Single-ride fare (no transfers) is $1.50 (75¢ for seniors, students, and children). Day passes are available for $3 ($1.50 for seniors, students, and children); for premium routes (serving the suburbs), the 1-day pass is $5 ($3 discounted). You can purchase single tickets and day passes from the new Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) on all rail station platforms.

Of particular interest to visitors (especially kids) in the downtown area is the free **McKinney Avenue Streetcar Service** (also called the **M-Line Trolley**), which travels from the Dallas Arts District to Cityplace Station and the West Village (it goes along McKinney Ave. from Uptown's Allen St. to downtown's Ross Ave. and St. Paul Ave., next

to the Dallas Museum of Art). The vintage trolleys are from 1906, 1913, and 1920, and operate year-round between 7am and 10pm weekdays, 10am and 10pm weekends (every 15 min. during peak and lunch hours, every half-hour off-peak hours and weekends). The trolley is perfect for bar, gallery, and restaurant shopping in Uptown, and great for getting from hotels in the area to the Arts District downtown.

***Note:*** I've included nearby DART Light Rail stations in the listings in this chapter but only when one is within a 20-minute walk of the hotel, restaurant, or attraction. For additional route and fare information for all of DART, call ✆ **214/979-1111,** or log on to www.dart.org.

## By Car

You can now actually get around Dallas without a car, if you stick to the major downtown sights, hotels, and restaurants. However, if you want to visit shopping centers in North Dallas or outlying areas, like Arlington and Fort Worth, most people will be better off with an automobile. Be advised, though, that if your hotel doesn't have parking, street parking can be an expensive hassle in the downtown area.

The major car-rental agencies, which have outlets at DFW and Love Field airports and at several addresses throughout the Metroplex, include **Alamo** (✆ 800/462-5266; www.alamo.com), **Avis** (✆ 800/230-4898; www.avis.com), **Budget** (✆ 800/527-0700; www.budget.com), **Dollar** (✆ 800/800-3665; www.dollar.com), **Enterprise** (✆ 800/736-8222; www.enterprise.com), **Hertz** (✆ 800/654-3131; www.hertz.com), **National** (✆ 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com), and **Thrifty** (✆ 800/847-4389; www.thrifty.com).

***Note:*** Yellow lights do little to slow down drivers in Dallas; even the running of red lights seems to have become epidemic in recent years, so be very careful before proceeding when the light turns green.

## By Taxi

Don't expect to hail a cab as you would in midtown Manhattan, though you will find taxis parked in front of the bigger, upscale hotels and at the airports. Mostly, though, you'll need to call a cab. Among the more than dozen taxi companies are **Cowboy Cab Company** (✆ 214/428-0202) and **Yellow Checker** (✆ 214/426-6262).

Fares are $2.25 (initial drop) and 20¢ each additional 1/9 mile. Extras include a $2 extra passenger charge, a $3.60 airport exit fee, and a $2.60 airport drop-off fee.

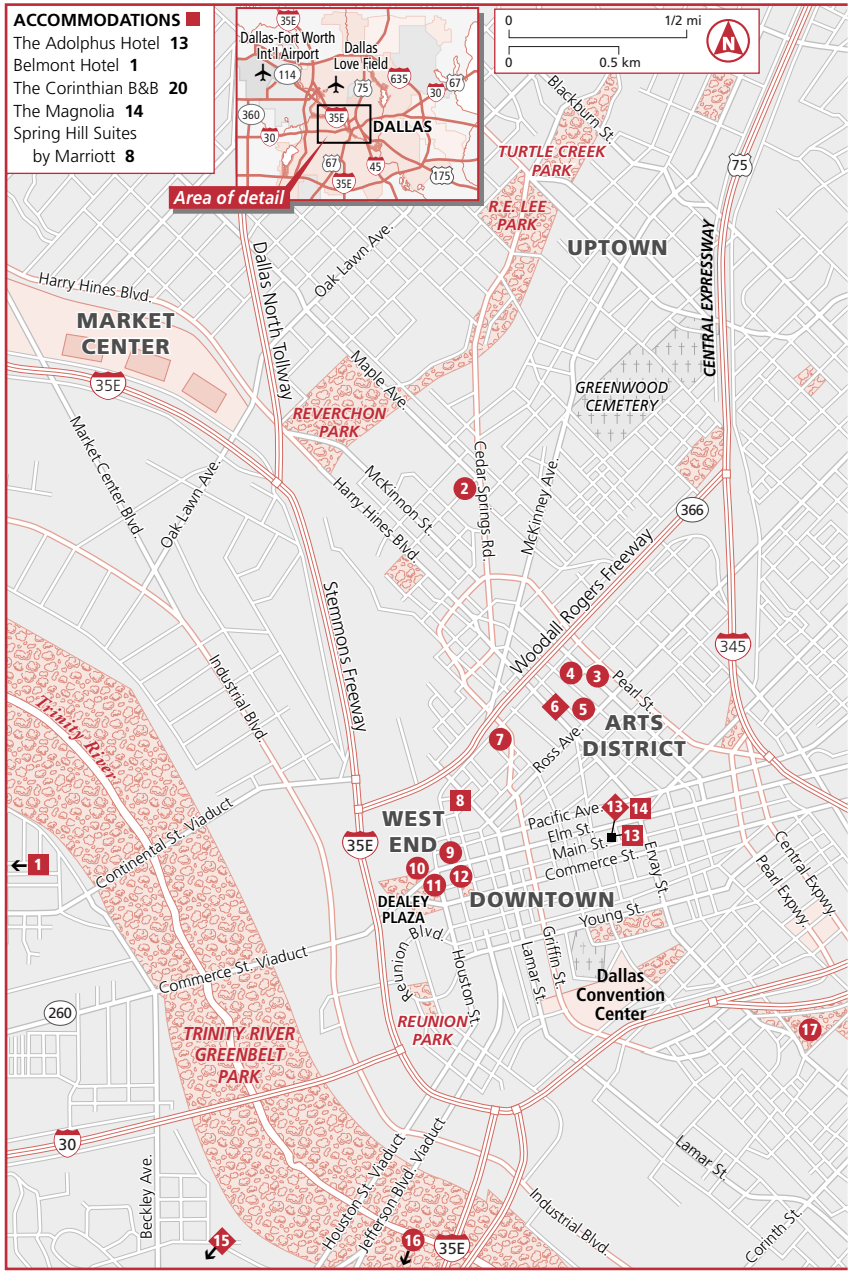
### Tips Real Highway Names

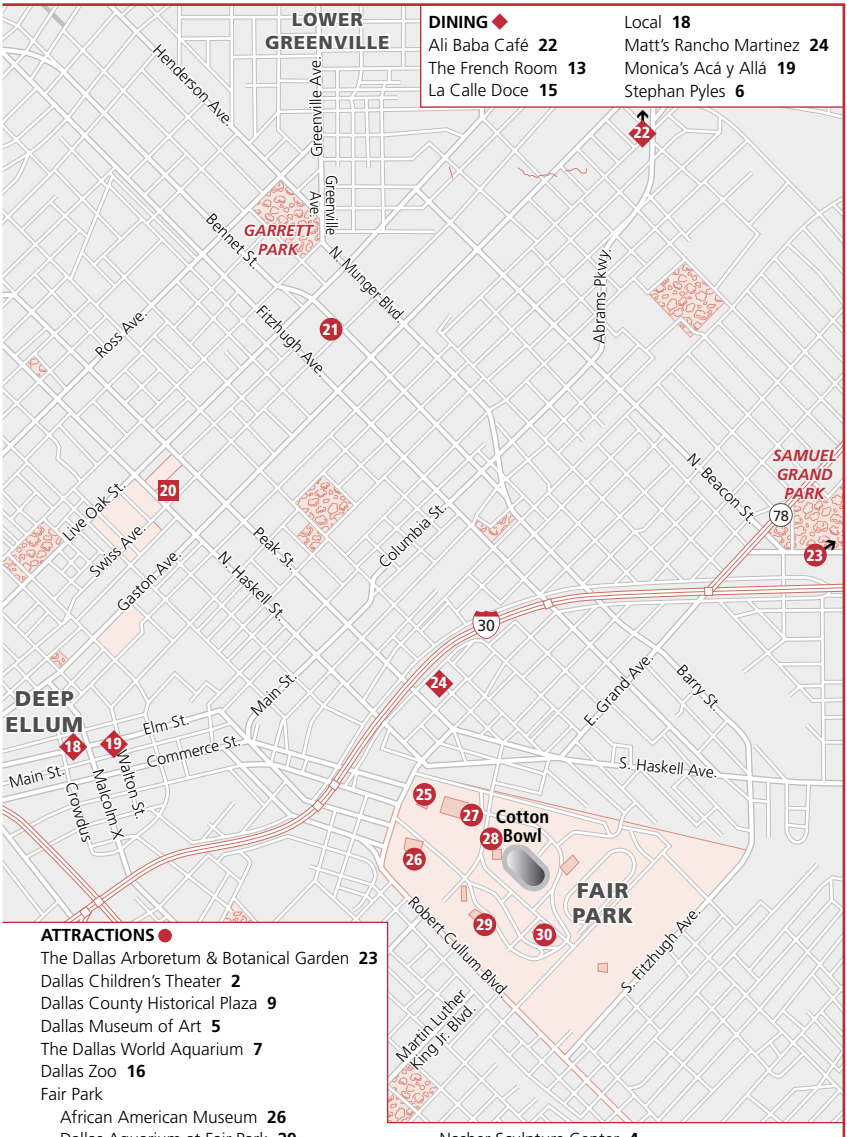
To get around Dallas, you'll need to know and adopt the colloquial names of the major local thoroughfares. As a general rule, numbers give way to proper names.

| Official Name | Real-Folks Name |
|---|---|
| U.S. 75 | Central Expressway ("Central") |
| I-635 | LBJ Freeway ("LBJ") |
| Northwest Highway | Loop 12 |
| I-35E St | emmons |
| I-35/U.S. 77/I-635/I-30 | R. L. Thornton |

# Downtown & Deep Ellum Accommodations, Dining & Attractions






LOWER GREENVILLE
Henderson Ave.
Greenville Ave.
Greenville Ave.
Bennet St.
GARRETT PARK
N. Munger Blvd.
Ross Ave.
Fitzhugh Ave.
Abrams Pkwy.
N. Beacon St.
SAMUEL GRAND PARK
Live Oak St.
Swiss Ave.
Gaston Ave.
Peak St.
N. Haskell St.
Columbia St.
DEEP ELLUM
Elm St.
Main St.
Commerce St.
Main St.
Crowdus
Malcolm X.
Walton St.
E. Grand Ave.
Barry St.
S. Haskell Ave.
Cotton Bowl
FAIR PARK
Robert Cullum Blvd.
Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
S. Fitzhugh Ave.
78
30
DINING
Ali Baba Café 22
The French Room 13
La Calle Doce 15
Local 18
Matt's Rancho Martinez 24
Monica's Acá y Allá 19
Stephan Pyles 6
ATTRACTIONS
The Dallas Arboretum & Botanical Garden 23
Dallas Children's Theater 2
Dallas County Historical Plaza 9
Dallas Museum of Art 5
The Dallas World Aquarium 7
Dallas Zoo 16
Fair Park
African American Museum 26
Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park 29
Hall of State 28
Museum of Science & Nature 30
Museum of the American Railroad 27
The Women's Museum 25
John F. Kennedy Memorial 12
Nasher Sculpture Center 4
Old City Park 17
Old Red Courthouse 11
The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza 10
Swiss Avenue Historic District 21
Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art 3

## Fast Facts Dallas

***American Express*** There are offices at 8317 Preston Center Plaza (✆ **800/363-0214;** Mon–Fri 9am–6pm), and at **Landmark Travel Services,** Two Turtle Creek Village Tower, 3838 Oak Lawn, no. 230 (✆ **214/520-9998;** Mon–Fri 8:30am–5pm).

***Babysitters*** If your hotel doesn't offer babysitting, contact **Baby Sitters of Dallas** (✆ **214/692-1354;** www.babysittersofdallas.com) for child-care.

***Dentists*** To find a local dentist, call ✆ **800/DENTIST** (336-8478).

***Doctors*** The **Doctor Directory** at St. Paul Medical Center (✆ **214/879-3099**) is a physician's referral service that can direct you to an appropriate health professional or specialist.

***Drugstores*** There are 24-hour **Eckerd** drugstores located at 10455 N. Central Expwy. at Meadow (✆ 214/369-3872), and 703 Preston Forest Center (✆ 214/363-1571). There's also **Kroger,** 17194 Preston Rd. at Campbell Road (✆ 972/931-9371), and **Albertsons,** 7007 Arapaho Rd. (✆ 972/387-8977).

***Hospitals*** Major hospitals include the **Baylor University Medical Center,** 3500 Gaston Ave. (✆ 214/820-0111; for 24-hr. emergency, 214/820-2501); the **Children's Medical Center of Dallas,** 1935 Motor St. (✆ 214/456-7000); and **Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas,** 8200 Walnut Hill Lane at Greenville Avenue (✆ 214/345-6789).

***Internet Access*** The **Visitor Information Office** at the Old Red Courthouse (Houston, Main, and Commerce sts.) has computers with Internet access for an hourly fee. Decidedly hipper is **Main Street Internet,** 2656 Main St. (✆ **214/237-1121**); it's got a full bar, overstuffed couches, and occasional live music.

***Maps*** The Visitor Information Offices at DFW Airport and the Old Red Courthouse (at Houston, Main, and Commerce sts.) have several maps of varying detail of Dallas and the surrounding area. If that's not enough, contact **MAP Dallas/Fort Worth** (✆ **817/949-2225**), which provides free street maps and visitor guides.

***Newspapers & Magazines*** Both the *Dallas Morning News* "Weekend Guide" (which comes out on Fri) and the *Dallas Observer,* a free weekly, have plenty of current arts, entertainment, and dining information. *D Magazine,* a local monthly, has similar listings, as well as restaurant reviews. *Dallas Voice* is a free weekly serving Dallas's gay and lesbian community, with listings of upcoming events.

***Police*** For a police emergency, dial ✆ **911;** for nonemergencies, call ✆ **214/742-1519** or 972/574-4454. The main precinct headquarters is located at 334 S. Hall, in the central business district (✆ **214/670-5840**).

***Post Office*** The central post office, 400 N. Ervay St. (✆ **800/275-8777** or 214/760-4700), is open Monday through Saturday from 8:30am to 5pm.

***Safety*** In most areas during the day, Dallas is as safe as any big American city. You should exercise particular care, though, around Fair Park and after 7pm in downtown. Gay and lesbian travelers should exercise caution in the Oak Lawn section; even though it is the area of greatest concentration of gay residents and establishments, harassment has historically been a problem.

***Taxes*** The general sales tax is 8.25%, hotel tax is 15%, and restaurant tax is 7%.

***Transit Information*** For public transportation questions, call ✆ **214/979-1111.**

***Weather*** For weather information, call ✆ **214/787-1111;** for current time and temperature, call ✆ **214/844-6611.**

## WHERE TO STAY

If you're in Dallas for a business trip or just a brief vacation, or are hoping to avoid too much time on Dallas freeways, you'd do well to choose your hotel according to neighborhood. Some of the city's best hotels are downtown near the central business and Dallas Arts District, and in the fashionable area called Uptown, but many more hotels (especially more affordable chains) are nestled in North Dallas and near Irving. For most people, the latter locations will involve considerably more highway time, because Dallas is so spread out.

Dallas has a bundle of excellent choices at the top end, many chic and modern, but a number of them surprisingly Old World in feel. The majority of hotel offerings in the city are large and luxurious, well-run hotels aimed squarely at business travelers, though some very appealing boutique hotels have also taken root. The high-end luxury market has really taken off, with two new five-star offerings—the Mandarin (scheduled to open in 2010) and the Ritz-Carlton (p. 88)—competing with the most ballyhooed properties. The best of the cheaper options are all-suites hotels. ***Note:*** Reservations in Dallas are toughest to come by when conventions take over the city. Check as early as possible with the **Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) to find out if your visit coincides with major business traffic to the city.

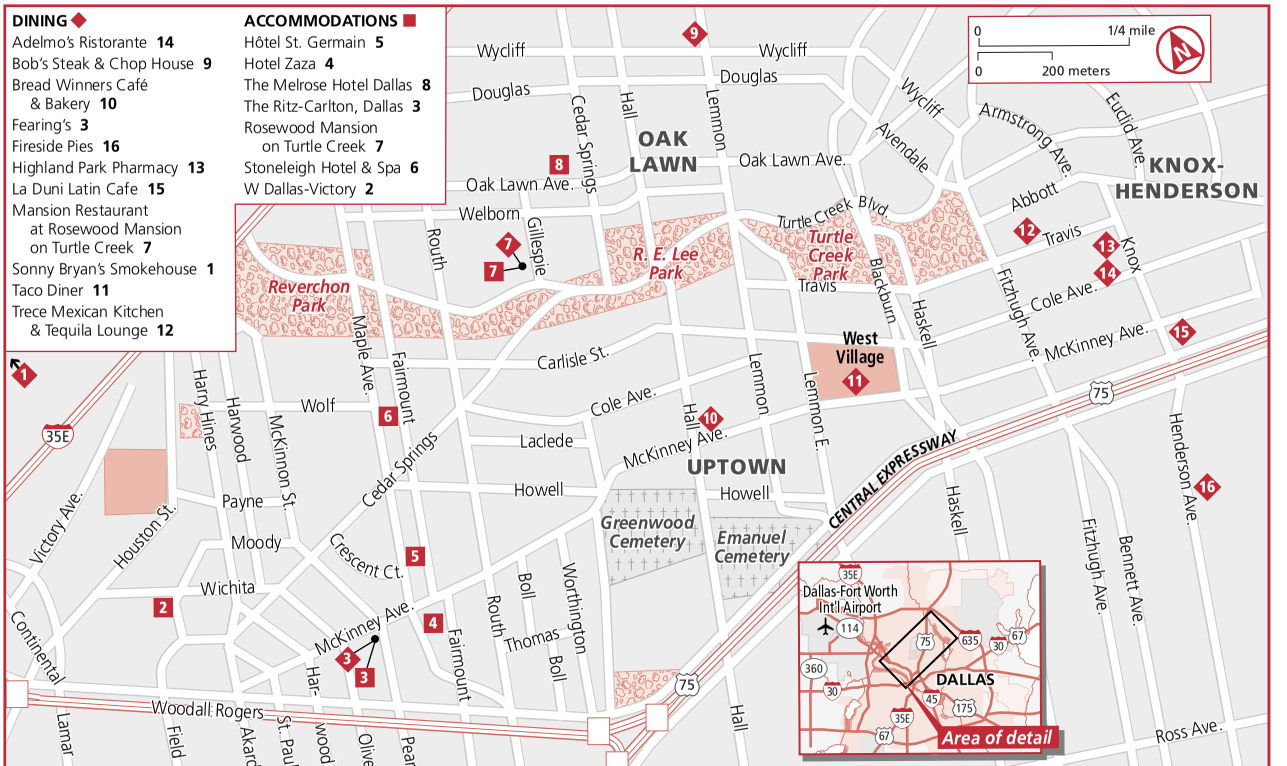
The rates cited below are high-season rack rates—few people pay list price, and you shouldn't either. At a minimum, request the lower, corporate rate and ask about special deals. Virtually all hotels offer some deals, especially on weekends when their business clientele dries up. Check the individual hotels' websites for special online offers. The hotel occupancy tax in Dallas is 15% (the rates quoted below do not include tax). Breakfast, either continental or buffet, is offered free at several hotels, as noted below. Do not assume that breakfast is included; if it is not, it can really add to your bill.

### Downtown & Deep Ellum

#### Expensive

**The Adolphus Hotel ★★★** Built in 1912 by the Missouri beer baron Adolphus Busch, this hotel is the grande dame of Dallas hotels. In the midst of the financial district, just a couple of blocks from another, more contemporary landmark—Neiman Marcus—this Beaux Arts hotel exudes luxury and refinement. Behind its historic facade, guests enter a world of baroque splendor and deep pampering: dark-wood parlors, beautiful art and antiques such as 17th-century Flemish tapestries and crystal chandeliers, a grand ballroom, and an opulent dining room. Rooms are very large and tastefully appointed in English country-house style, with marble bathrooms and separate sitting and dining areas. The suites are about as large as Texas. The graceful, old-world style of the Adolphus is epitomized by the three-course English tea served in the lobby living room every afternoon from 3 to 5pm. The French Room (p. 94), serving classic French cuisine, is one of Dallas's finest restaurants; it is about as baroque a dining room as you'll find in town.

# Uptown & Oak Lawn Accommodations & Dining



1321 Commerce St. (at Akard), Dallas, TX 75202. ✆ **800/221-9083** or 214/742-8200. Fax 214/651-3563. www.hoteladolphus.com. 422 units. $169–$289 double; $209–$459 suite. Special theme packages available online. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20. DART Light Rail: Akard. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness room and athletic club; 24-hr. concierge; free airport shuttle; salon; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, Wi-Fi, hair dryer.

**The Magnolia ★** Located in the city's most famous building, the landmark 1922 headquarters of Magnolia (later Mobil) Oil—known by its illuminated rooftop sign sculpture of Pegasus, the winged horse—this hotel is one of the most prized properties leading a renaissance in the heart of downtown. Many of the building's original architectural details have been lovingly preserved. The hotel is refined and state-of-the-art, with a terrific fitness center and business facilities. Rooms are quite a bit larger than most and handsomely designed in contemporary style, with leather club chairs and sleek desks, and many are two-bedroom suites with full kitchens, perfect for families or longer business stays. The Magnolia Room, which occupies the entire second floor, is a great place to unwind: It's got a stocked library, billiards, TV, bar, and Wi-Fi, and a buffet breakfast, evening cocktails, and bedtime milk and cookies (all complimentary) are served there. Shoppers will be happy to discover that the original Neiman Marcus is just down the block.

1401 Commerce St., Dallas, TX 75201. ✆ **888/915-1110** or 214/915-6500. Fax 214/253-0053. www.magnoliahoteldallas.com. 330 units. $189–$279 double; $329–$500 suite. Weekend rates as low as $119 double; romance, restaurant, and other packages available; check website for details. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $15. DART Light Rail: Akard. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; full fitness center; sauna; concierge; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

## Moderate

**Belmont Hotel ★** (Finds) Though retro chic is all the rage in Dallas, nobody does it more authentically than this hipster boutique hotel at the edge of Oak Cliff (a 5-min. drive from downtown). Rising from the ashes of a 1946 motor lodge, and from a bluff with panoramic views of downtown Dallas, it's a great spot for arts, architecture, and design-conscious sorts to stay—and feel like they're not in Dallas. It does midcentury modern without the heavy dose of glamour other new hotels insist on. It's cozy and comfortable, and a variety of rooms spread out over four distinctly flavored buildings, including garden rooms, two-story loft suites, and bungalow rooms. Accommodations echo the spare aesthetic of the period, but add nice doses of warmth and color. Bonuses include flat-panel TVs, plush robes, and Kiehl's products, making this nifty little place an excellent value. An outdoor terrace and lounge area frame the Big D skyline at sunset, and the lounge bar, BarBelmont, has become the watering hole of choice for the cognoscenti fleeing the slick Uptown scene.

901 Fort Worth Ave. (Oak Cliff, 1 block north of the I-30/Sylvan Rd. exit), Dallas, TX 75208. ✆ **866/870-8010** or 214/393-2000. www.belmontdallas.com. 40 units. $125–$160 double; $200–$240 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Diner restaurant; bar; outdoor heated pool; fitness room; spa services; room service (from neighborhood restaurants); same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

**The Corinthian Bed and Breakfast ★** (Finds) B&Bs aren't much of a Dallas thing, and the Corinthian is closer to a boutique hotel than a traditional B&B. As such, it's a great alternative in Big D. On the east side of Central Expressway, north of Deep Ellum and near Swiss Avenue, the house is an elegant 1905 structure—which once served as a boardinghouse for young ladies and was converted to a B&B in 2001—with a formal

dining room, a handsome parlor (complete with the original fireplace and antique grand piano), a grand staircase, and a modern carriage house out back. The rooms are cozy and nicely decorated with a smattering of antiques, homey without trying too hard. Gourmet breakfasts are a source of pride.

4125 Junius St., Dallas, TX 75246. ✆ **866/598-9988** or 214/818-0400. Fax 214/818-0401. www.corinthianbandb.com. 5 units. $129–$239 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Concierge services; small business center; media and game room. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, Wi-Fi, hair dryer.

**Spring Hill Suites by Marriott** If you want to be right in the thick of it—within walking distance of the restaurants and rowdy bars of the West End, the Sixth Floor Museum and Dealey Plaza, the Arts District, and downtown's business district—but don't want to burn through your savings or the company per diem, this Marriott property (formerly an AmeriSuites hotel) is a good, safe, and convenient choice. The good-size, comfortable suites have basic kitchenettes and sleeper sofas—nothing fancy, but solid accommodations. Visiting businesspeople should find the business center to their liking, while more leisure-oriented visitors should take to the second-floor outdoor pool, which, though small, has privileged views of the Big D skyline.

1907 N. Lamar St. (at Corbin), Dallas, TX 75202. ✆ **888/287-9400** or 214/999-0500. Fax 214/999-0501. www.marriott.com. 168 units. $169 double. Rates include breakfast buffet. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $12. DART Light Rail: West End. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; fitness center; high-speed Internet access; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.



## Uptown & Oak Lawn

### Very Expensive

**Hôtel St. Germain ★★★** The St. Germain is blissfully out of place in Dallas. The tiny, intimate boutique hotel and restaurant envelops guests in old-world luxury, with a library, parlors, and sumptuous style that borders on bordello. Equal parts late-19th-century France and New Orleans, each of the seven suites is individually decorated, with pampering features such as wood-burning fireplaces, tapestries, draped Napoleón sleigh beds, bidets, and Jacuzzis and soaking tubs. Indulgence is rarely cheap, and of course it isn't here (though the two largest and most expensive suites really skew the price range); but you get an awful lot of refined white-glove treatment for the price of admission. The romantic restaurant, which overlooks an ivy-covered garden courtyard and serves a seven-course, prix-fixe candlelight gourmet dinner (Tues–Sat for $85 per person), is ideal for a special occasion (jackets required) or merely a superior meal. The parlorlike Champagne Bar feels a bit like Paris in Dallas, and that's saying something!

2516 Maple Ave. (at Mahon St.), Dallas, TX 75201. ✆ **214/871-2516.** Fax 214/871-0740. www.hotelstgermain.com. 7 units. $290–$650 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. DART Light Rail: Pearl. **Amenities:** Restaurant; fitness center; concierge; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

**The Ritz-Carlton, Dallas ★★** The boom predicted for the Victory Park area, marketed as a spiffier Dallas version of Times Square, rides as much on new, buzzed-about, five-star luxury properties like the Ritz as it does on the district's centerpiece, the American Airlines Center. The good news, then, is that this high-rise hotel and condo building, designed by Robert A. M. Stern, does not disappoint. With amenities like Dean Fearing's ballyhooed restaurant, a 12,000-square-foot spa, a rooftop pool and deck, a massive ballroom, and expansive views, it pretty much defines what a luxury hotel in Dallas should be. Rooms

(occupying the first 8 floors; those reaching to the 21st floor are private residences) are huge and elegantly appointed, with rich fabrics, Frette linens, and Bulgari bath products. While it's the perfect place for well-heeled guests whose tastes do not run to the chic modern minimalism so popular in new designer hotels, it's not overdone or stuffy, either. It feels, rather, gently contemporary.

2121 McKinney Ave., Dallas, TX 75201. ✆ **214/922-0200.** Fax 214/922-4707. www.ritzcarlton.com. 218 units. $399–$519 double; suites starting at $569. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20. DART Light Rail: Pearl. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor heated pool; fitness center; full-service spa; 24-hr. business center; 24-hr. room service; 24-hr. laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, DVD/CD player, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek ★★★** Where movie stars, princes, and presidents stay, and most of the rest of us paupers merely dream about, the hilltop Mansion, usually lauded as the most desirable hotel in Dallas, is luxury personified. Whereas the Adolphus (see above) has an old-world moneyed feel, the Mansion has a brasher new-money atmosphere. It is perhaps the top place in the state for a blowout splurge; it consistently lands among the very top hotels in polls in national travel magazines. If it feels like a home—albeit a very grand and showy one—that's because it once was the spectacular residence of a Texas cotton magnate in the 1920s and 1930s. The Mansion, now a Rosewood hotel, is all marble floors, inlaid wood ceilings, and stained-glass windows. Regular rooms are gargantuan, as are the beds and bathrooms, and the suites ridiculously so. All have top-quality linens and bath products (Lady Primrose), but some visitors report that the rooms routinely dispensed for weekend rates suffer in comparison with the top-flight ones. Service, though, is faultless across-the-board. The Mansion's restaurant (p. 97), which received a makeover after the departure of chef Dean Fearing, no longer focuses on Southwestern fare, but it continues to be one of Dallas's finest hotel dining experiences.

2821 Turtle Creek Blvd. (off Cedar Springs Rd.), Dallas, TX 75219. ✆ **888-ROSEWOOD** (767-3966) or 214/599-2100. Fax 214/528-4187. www.mansiononturtlecreek.com. 143 units. $375–$550 double; from $695 suite. Weekend rates and other packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20. Small pets allowed with surcharge. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor heated pool; fitness center; sauna; concierge; high-speed Internet access; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

**W Dallas-Victory ★** This splashy property, part of the ever-expanding W chain, rises with transparent, glass-happy hubris, facing the Big D skyline, and it's received oodles of attention from local scenesters who dash to the new big thing. Principal among its attractions are the trendy Ghostbar and local incarnation of Craft, a NYC restaurant that's taken up residence in the W. The hotel, near downtown and the chic shopping and restaurant destinations of Uptown, is a striking 15-story tower (including pricey residential condos) with a 16th-floor infinity pool. Inside it's stylishly minimalist, if noticeably self-conscious. Rooms have plenty of rich, spare style, with colored tile bathrooms, swank furnishings and fabrics, and large windows. Accommodations aren't merely doubles or deluxes; they're called "spectacular rooms," "wonderful rooms," "fabulous rooms," "mega rooms," and, not to be outdone by adjectives, "wow suites" and "extreme wow suites." That may strike some as just a little too precious; for much less dough, I'd haul my bags over to the Palomar (p. 91) if it's contemporary stylings at a reasonable price you want. But scenesters with toy dogs in tow (yes, pets are welcome) will undoubtedly be happy here; the trendy Ghostbar even comes with its own helipad, and there's a 10,000-square-foot Bliss Spa for all the required pampering.

2440 Victory Park Lane (next to the American Airlines Center), Dallas, TX 75219. ✆ **877/WHOTELS** (946-8357) or 214/397-4100. Fax 214/397-4105. www.whotels.com/dallas. 252 units. $299–$599 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $15. DART Light Rail: Victory. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; outdoor heated infinity pool; fitness center; full-service Bliss spa; 24-hr. business center; 24-hr. room service; 24-hr. laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, DVD/CD player, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## Expensive

**Hotel ZaZa ★★** Dallas's former "it" hotel now has a host of competitors, including the new W Hotel (above), as the place to be seen, but the ZaZa remains confident and brash, its style appealing to the young and fabulous, fashionable, and merely wealthy. The ZaZa is pretty much a cocktail of SoHo, San Francisco, and Los Angeles as served up in Dallas, but with the friendliness common in Texas. A business hotel for many in the arts-and-entertainment world, this swank four-story boutique lodging at the southern end of McKinney Avenue, the main axis of chic Uptown, is a pleasurefest of exclusive style. Stylishly decorated standard rooms have plush fabrics and relatively understated good taste, but the real stars are the array of spacious Concept suites with themed decor (ranging from "Out of Africa" and "Erotica" to the expected "Texas" and, no lie, the "Shag-a-delic" Suite) and balconies. ZaZa has gone even more gaga with its massive "Magnificent Seven" suites, which are more like apartments. The eye-popping, over-the-top Dragonfly restaurant and cocktail lounge are fixtures in the Big D nightlife firmament, and the Zen-like ZaSpa continues the hotel's sybaritic overtures.

2332 Leonard St. (at McKinney), Dallas, TX 75201. ✆ **800/597-8399** or 214/468-8399. Fax 214/468-8397. www.hotelzaza.com. 145 units. $245–$300 double; $350–$515 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20. DART Light Rail: Pearl. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; fitness room and full-service spa; 24-hr. concierge; Wi-Fi; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, hair dryer.

**The Melrose Hotel Dallas ★** This is another one of Dallas's upscale hotels with an old-world, rather than an Old West, atmosphere. In the heart of the Oak Lawn neighborhood, near the nightlife of Cedar Springs and Turtle Creek, the midsize Melrose feels like a gracious old neighbor. Built in 1924, the eight-floor hotel was completely renovated in 1999. Once a favorite of artists and entertainers such as Arthur Miller, Elizabeth Taylor, and Luciano Pavarotti, the newly revamped hotel today caters mostly to execs and couples on weekend getaways. No two rooms are alike, though they are uniformly luxurious and inviting, with 10-foot ceilings, crown molding, antiques, and marble-tiled bathrooms. The renovated Landmark restaurant consistently wins accolades, and the stately Library Bar is a terrific spot for a nightcap.

3015 Oak Lawn Ave. (at Cedar Springs Rd.), Dallas, TX 75219. ✆ **800/MELROSE** (635-7673) or 214/521-5151. Fax 214/521-2470. www.melrosehoteldallas.com. 184 units. $249 double; $349 suite. Weekend and Internet-only rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; piano bar; 24-hr. fitness center; concierge; complimentary local shuttle service; high-speed Internet access; 24-hr. room service; 24-hr. dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

**Stoneleigh Hotel & Spa ★★** A fixture of Dallas since 1923, the new Stoneleigh is hardly recognizable after a $36-million renovation. And that's a good thing. The once run-down hotel was lovingly brought back to its original grandeur in 2008, and it has style to burn, with the welcoming feel of a large luxury boutique hotel. The makeover hasn't erased the hotel's Art Deco foundations, thankfully, most evident in public rooms and the Studio Suites, my favorite rooms here. The Stoneleigh explodes with vibrant

color and rich surfaces, including deep red walls and shiny black marble sink countertops in some bathrooms. Featuring bold original art by Texas artists, a 5,000-square-foot spa, and a cool Art Deco–style Bolla Bar, the hotel is a haven for business travelers and vacationing hipsters alike.

2927 Maple Ave. (at Randall St.), Dallas, TX 75201. ✆ **800/921-8498** or 214/871-7111. www.stoneleighhotel.com. 170 units. $249–$455 double; $550 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness room and full-service spa; 24-hr. concierge; 24-hr. business center; Wi-Fi; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, CD/MP3 player, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## North & East Dallas

### Expensive

**The Guest Lodge at Cooper Aerobic Center ★** Finds Worried that every time you go on vacation you seem to put on a few pounds? Then I've got the place for you. This inviting retreat at one of the nation's foremost health facilities, the Cooper Clinic, is set on 30 acres of trees, trails, and duck ponds in North Dallas. The small hotel—called the "second-healthiest hotel in the country" by *USA Today*—remains a bit of a well-kept secret, a place to unwind and work off stress and pounds. The spacious, comfortable rooms have French doors that open onto private balconies. Guests have complimentary access to the Cooper Fitness Center, which is connected to the famous sports clinic named for Dr. Kenneth Cooper, the author of a dozen fitness books and one of the most influential figures in American fitness training and diagnostics. The facilities include a 40,000-square-foot health club, tennis courts, pools, and running track, as well as a Mediterranean-style spa for all manner of relaxing body treatments. You can't very well stay at a place like this without eating healthfully, so most guests take full advantage of the complimentary full continental breakfast and "heart-healthy" fare at the Colonnade Room restaurant.

12230 Preston Rd. (at Churchill), Dallas, TX 75230. ✆ **800/444-5187** or 972/386-0306. Fax 972/386-2942. www.cooperaerobics.com. 62 units. $213–$404 double; $315–$355 suite. All-inclusive spa packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; tennis courts; fitness center; spa; Wi-Fi; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

**Palomar Dallas ★★** A marvelous renovation of a '60s-era Hilton has created one of Dallas's newest and most fashionable hotels. Respecting just enough of the 1960s bones, the Palomar—which opened in September 2006—now struts its stuff with chic, retro glamour. It not only competes with but even upstages some of the big boys on the scene, such as the new, self-consciously cool W Hotel. Public areas and rooms exude mid-century-modern cool, with brick walls in the hallways and brightly colored accents in the rooms. Elegant furnishings and bedding are enlivened by geometric patterns. Executive king rooms, usually occupying corner locations, are especially spacious and comfortable. Unusual for a hotel of this level of luxury, pets are welcome. Excellent amenities include a chic outdoor infinity pool, a plush Exhale Spa with yoga classes, and a restaurant and bar, Central 214, which looks like an update of a swank Palm Springs hangout and has quickly become an urban hipster's destination. Taking the retro flavor a step further is Trader Vic's, an early '70s Polynesian restaurant and Dallas fixture my mom waxes nostalgically about. Service throughout the hotel is impeccable, and special needs are more than taken care of, such as the "Bone Appetite" package that welcomes four-legged guests.

5300 E. Mockingbird Lane (at Central Expwy.), Dallas, TX 75206. ✆ **888/253-9030** or 214/520-7969. Fax 214/520-8025. www.hotelpalomar-dallas.com. 198 units. $260–$300 double; $460–$480 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. DART Light Rail: Mockingbird. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; outdoor heated pool; fitness center; full-service spa; 24-hr. business center; 24-hr. room service. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD/CD player, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## Moderate

**Embassy Suites Park Central** (Value) (Kids) In far North Dallas, on the edge of the bedroom community Richardson, this hotel is equally comfortable for families and business travelers (especially those with Texas Instruments and the telecom businesses along the corridor just north on Central Expwy.). Rooms are all suites; they're comfortable and simply outfitted with separate living areas and sleeper sofas, and are built around a large central, airy atrium.

13131 N. Central Expwy. (just north of LBJ Fwy.), Dallas, TX 75243. ✆ **888/254-0637** or 972/234-3300. Fax 972/437-9863. http://embassysuites.hilton.com. 279 units. $125–$179 double. Special offers frequently available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets 25 lb. or less allowed with $25 surcharge. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor pool; fitness center; sauna; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Hotel Lumen** ★★ (Finds) An unexpected delight in the Park Cities area, right next to the SMU campus, this terrifically stylish, discreet boutique hotel opened in the spring of 2006. It oozes contemporary panache and confidence, with luxurious mid-century-modern-inspired rooms and a dark, swanky bar and restaurant, Social, that has become a destination among those in the know. Though it clearly targets a hip crowd of upscale business, media, and arts patrons, it's also a bargain, and it's even pet-friendly (pet packages are available, with complimentary "pawdicures"). Accommodations, done in rich chocolates and creams, feature angular desks, plasma TVs, plush linens, and cool tiled bathrooms. The most enticing rooms, the Spectra studios, are very spacious and have large picture windows with LED lighting facing Hillcrest Avenue and SMU. Though the Lumen's sister hotel, the excellent and similarly hip Palomar (see above), has captured most of the media buzz, this small hotel is the one for anyone looking for a quiet stay in chic surroundings.

6101 Hillcrest Ave. (just north of Mockingbird Lane), Dallas, TX 75205. ✆ **214/219-2400.** Fax 214/219-2402. www.hotellumen.com. 52 units. $170–$197 double; $220–$249 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness center; limited room service; 24-hr. laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD/CD player, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Hyatt Summerfield Suites** ★ (Value) Recently acquired by Hyatt, this residential-style hotel remains a very good value, popular with business visitors who often stay for a week or more. Reasonably stylish and spacious suites are coolly decorated in muted tones, with fully equipped kitchens. (There are three different floor plans to choose from, but for most visitors the least expensive room is sufficient.) Conveniently located off Central Expressway and near NorthPark Center and Northwest Highway, it's just 10 minutes from downtown (unless you catch rush hour, when it could take forever) and even nearer to the nightlife options of Greenville and McKinney avenues.

8221 N. Central Expwy. (U.S. 75 at Northwest Hwy.), Dallas, TX 75225. ✆ **866/974-9288** or 214/696-1555. Fax 214/696-1550. www.hyatt.com/hyatt/summerfield. 155 units. $139–$159 double, including breakfast buffet. Weekend rates available. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; fitness center; business center; Wi-Fi; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, DVD, dataport, kitchen, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## Kids Family-Friendly Hotels in DFW

**Embassy Suites Park Central** (p. 92) Large and airy, with glass elevators that stream up the interior of a huge central atrium, this hotel welcomes the whole family—even pets. Distractions include a nice pool, full free breakfasts, and racquetball courts. For parents, there are free cocktails every evening.

**Four Seasons Resort and Club at Las Colinas** (see below) Your kids don't have to be golfers, but if they're into any sports at all, this resort should seem like an amusement park to them, with tennis courts, three outdoor pools, and one indoor pool, as well as a host of complimentary children's programs.

**Residence Inn Fort Worth University** (p. 133) Perfect for families, this friendly hotel has rooms that are more like apartments, with fully equipped kitchens and comfortable sitting areas. When you tell the kids they can walk to the acclaimed Fort Worth Zoo, they're sure to think you've made the right choice.

**Residence Inn Fort Worth Cultural District** (p. 132) The spacious rooms, full kitchens, outdoor pool, and foldout couches are just a few of the amenities that make this hotel, on the edge of the Cultural District, great for families.



### Near the Airport

#### Very Expensive

**Four Seasons Resort and Club at Las Colinas** ★★ Kids Plenty of visitors come to Dallas to work, but at the Four Seasons they also come to play, and seriously. With one of the top golf courses in the area (off-limits to nonguests), this is the place to stay if you've got to play golf and any old course won't do. The pros show up to play the PGA Byron Nelson Classic here every May, and the course consistently wins accolades as one of the best in the nation. Other sports enthusiasts will also be happy: The laid-back but luxurious property was a top-of-the-line sports club before it became a resort hotel, and there are tennis courts, pools, tracks, and a full-service European spa on the 400-acre grounds. Guest rooms are large, airy, and very elegant; golf villa rooms have terraces overlooking the 18th green or the handsomely landscaped pool garden. The hotel is only about 15 minutes from DFW Airport.

4150 N. MacArthur Blvd. (at Mills Lane), Irving, TX 75038. ✆ **800/819-5053** or 972/717-0700. Fax 972/717-2550. www.fourseasons.com/dallas. 357 units. $340–$495 double; from $750 suite (rates include use of sports club and spa; greens fees are extra). Weekend rates, sports packages, and other packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 3 outdoor pools and an indoor lap pool; golf course; 8 lit outdoor and 4 indoor tennis courts; fitness center; children's programs; concierge; 24-hr. business center; Wi-Fi; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron, safe.

#### Inexpensive

**Quality Inn & Suites DFW North** Value As its name makes clear, this member of the Quality Inn chain offers convenience to travelers on their way in or out of Dallas, including free airport transportation. What you'll find are good, standard-size rooms (with surprisingly bold bed covers and curtains) and a range of services and amenities

designed to make your short stay hassle free. One-bedroom suites feature extra sofa sleepers in the living room and large work desks, while executive rooms sport cathedral ceilings and skylights, and some come equipped with whirlpool tubs. And if you're not inclined to stay in your room and work, you can take advantage of the free full continental breakfast.

4100 W. John Carpenter Fwy. (just south of I-114, bt w. Esters and International Pkwy.), Irving, TX 75063. ✆ **877/424-6423** or 972/929-4008. Fax 972/929-4224. www.choicehotels.com. 108 units. $57–$87 double. Weekend rates available. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; car-rental desk; free airport shuttle; business center; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## WHERE TO DINE

It wasn't that long ago that the Dallas dining scene was pretty unexciting: It was mostly run-of-the-mill Mexican and Tex-Mex, undistinguished steakhouses, and halfhearted Southwestern themes. That has changed drastically, and today the Dallas restaurant scene has exploded. While you can still get home cooking, Tex-Mex, and barbecue in abundance, Dallas has suddenly become resolutely cosmopolitan, with chic and sophisticated Pan-Asian, Italian, and Southwestern newcomers injecting life into the local dining scene, a vigor that has even jolted the old stalwarts. Some of the hippest new spots are in fashionable hotels, including the excellent restaurants **Fearing's** at the new Ritz-Carlton Dallas; **Central 214** at Palomar Dallas; Hotel Lumen's **Social;** and **Craft** at W Dallas-Victory (see hotel reviews above). The Dallas Visitors Bureau once claimed four times more restaurants per capita in Dallas than New York City; since I'm from the former and spend much of my time in the latter, I'm more than a bit dubious about such a claim, but it's certain that you won't suffer from lack of choice.



### Downtown & Deep Ellum

#### Very Expensive

**The French Room** ★★ FRENCH/CONTINENTAL Dinner here is the closest thing in Dallas to a state dinner at Versailles. This is the restaurant that will make the biggest impression on your dining companions (and perhaps, though not necessarily, on your credit card statement). The grand French Room—under an elaborate vaulted ceiling and crystal chandeliers in the historic Adolphus Hotel (p. 85), with a new chef at the helm and named the top hotel restaurant in the country by Zagat—is a standout in every way. Formal but not stuffy, with impeccable service, it's a place to feel like king and queen for a day. The three-course prix fixe at $78 and the six-course Chef's Selection tasting menu at $95 ($145 with wine) represent excellent values for such a setting and all-around elegance and quality. From beef tenderloin with a black truffle-potato terrine to miso-marinated Alaskan halibut with baby shiitake and sweet potatoes in carrot-ginger sauce, the menu is superb throughout. Dessert may be a crème brûlée trio or, even better, the soufflé of the day (flavors change daily). As you might expect, the wine list is museum-quality, but there are also accessible options. The ambience is formal: Jackets are required for men; no jeans or tennis shoes permitted.

In the Adolphus Hotel, 1321 Commerce St. (at Akard). ✆ **214/742-8200.** www.hoteladolphus.com. Reservations required. Prix-fixe dinners $78–$160. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm. DART Light Rail: Akard.

**Stephan Pyles** ★★ NEW SOUTHWESTERN The local celebrity chef Stephan Pyles, a fifth-generation Texan, made his name with Southwestern cooking at Routh Street Café and then, most famously, Star Canyon, before taking a long hiatus. A couple

of years ago he returned to Dallas with a heap of fanfare and critical raves, establishing his eponymous restaurant downtown in the Arts District. Large, but not overwhelming in size, and flashy, but not ridiculously so, the restaurant is refined and cosmopolitan—a little like Dallas itself. It features exposed brick and Texas stone, an O'Keeffe-like stick chandelier, a copper-covered bar and dividing curtain, and comfortably spaced tables and semicircular leather-clad booths.

The main attraction of the dining room, though, is the huge, glass-enclosed kitchen. From it spills forth a delectable roster of Southwestern, Latin, and international dishes, opening with eight types of ceviche (available individually or in tasting groups), iced gazpacho shooters, and spit-roasted suckling pig and apple-pecan empanadas. Main courses boast similarly interesting twists but don't try too hard to be cutting edge. The boneless barbecued beef short rib, served with a tamal-criollo-and-chipotle salsa, is perfection, and a Star Canyon favorite, the bone-in cowboy rib-eye with red-chile onion rings and mushroom ragout, will also satisfy traditionalists. The wine list is about as good as it gets in Dallas, with an emphasis on lesser-known finds from around the world as well as big-spender California cabs and bordeaux. Value diners should check out lunch, which locals know to be a real bargain, with main courses under $15.

1807 Ross Ave., Ste. 200 (at St. Paul St.). ✆ **214/580-7000.** www.stephanpyles.com. Reservations required. Main courses $27–$45. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Mon–Wed 6–10:30pm; Thurs–Sat 6–11pm. DART Light Rail: Akard.

## Expensive

**Local ★★** (Finds) NEW AMERICAN With an arty, intimate, minimalist design that would be perfectly at home in Manhattan or San Francisco, tiny Local chicly inhabits Deep Ellum's Boyd Hotel, built in 1908 and the oldest standing hotel in Dallas. Though the neighborhood, once the hip spot downtown, has had a rough time of it, Local continues to excel. Original walls (one with painted period outdoor advertising that reads take care dui the woman's tonic) and hardwood floors have been preserved, adding a warm feel to the Eames chairs and black leather ette booths. With just 50 seats, the restaurant caters to the cognoscenti among Dallas diners, though the food has a decidedly homespun and laid-back angle. The well-executed menu is composed of "tall order" and "short order" dishes, with innovative twists on comfort food, including items such as hazelnut-mustard-crusted halibut, a buffalo burger basket, and mascarpone mac and cheese. The wine list has some hard-to-find selections from boutique producers. The chef's tasting menu, seven courses for $70, is a superb deal.

2936a Elm St. (at Malcolm X Blvd.). ✆ **214/752-7500.** Reservations required. Main courses $23–$38. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

## Moderate

**La Calle Doce ★** (Value) (Kids) MEXICAN/SEAFOOD This cozy Mexican joint, in a modest old blue house in Oak Cliff, south of Dallas, has been one of the best home-style Mexican restaurants in the area for more than 25 years. A cult favorite, it deserves to be much better known. The extensive menu focuses on nouvelle Mexican fish dishes, such as superb ceviche (fish and shrimp marinated with lime), Mexican seafood (such as octopus) cocktails, mahimahi tacos, and other main courses such as *chile relleno de mariscos* (poblano pepper stuffed with shrimp, scallops, octopus, and fish). They even do respectable Spanish paella, or you can opt for the more standard Tex-Mex plates. The soups, such as *sopa de pescado* (fish soup) and *caldo Xochitl* (Oaxacan-style chicken soup) make wonderful appetizers. The margaritas are among the best in town. If your kids like

Mexican and Tex-Mex, they should feel like they're eating at Grandma's house—that is, if they called Grandma *Abuela.*

415 W. 12th St. (btw. Zang and Tyler, west of I-35E; best to call for directions). ✆ **214/941-4304.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $7–$21. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–9:30pm; Sat 11am–10:30pm; Sun 11am–9pm.

**Monica's Acá y Allá** (Value) TEX-MEX Tex-Mex in a funky Deep Ellum setting—part restaurant, part bar, part dance floor—is the ticket at "Monica's Here and There," now in its second decade of consistent popularity. The inviting space is big on atmosphere, with deep-red bordello walls, a long pale-yellow banquet, and funky sconces, the perfect venue for high-volume salsa music and dressed-up margaritas (which are excellent, by the way). The creative menu offers new twists on Tex-Mex such as Mexican lasagna, snapper *verde* (in a green tomatillo sauce), and sirloin noir, as well as more traditional Mexican specialties. If the food makes you want to get up and dance, feel free. Friday and Saturday nights, the place heats up like a loud nightclub; but Sunday afternoons and early evenings are quieter, and there are free Latin dance lessons. The inexpensive Sunday brunch is rightly popular, and weeknight specials include half-price entrees on Tuesday and 75¢ margaritas on Wednesday. But one of the best bargains in the city is the daily lunch special for just $5. If you like Monica's, you'd be wise to check its sister restaurant, the more refined and upscale **Ciudad,** 3888 Oak Lawn Ave. in Turtle Creek Village (✆ **214/219-3141**); some locals have proclaimed it the finest Mexican in town.

2914 Main St. ✆ **214/748-7140.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $7–$16. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11am–2pm; Tues–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5pm–midnight; Sat 11am–3pm; Sun 9am–3pm and 6–11pm.

## Greenville Avenue & East Dallas

### Inexpensive

**Ali Baba Café** (Value) MIDDLE EASTERN Family-owned (two brothers and their mom, by way of Syria), Ali Baba—which has moved from its longtime Lower Greenville address to a spot near the Lakewood Theater—still draws crowds for its good, cheap Middle Eastern fare during limited dining hours. Don't be surprised to find a line of customers clamoring to get in. This plain, tiny place packs them in for great rich hummus, marinated beef, grilled chicken, falafel, and Syrian and Lebanese dishes like stuffed kibbe. The tabbouleh and signature rice dish, made with vermicelli and sautéed in seasoned olive oil, are standouts. If you find yourself in North Dallas rather than downtown, check out the newer, larger, and more upscale-looking **Ali Baba** in Richardson at 2103 N. Central Expwy. (✆ **972/437-1222**).

1901 Abrams Pkwy. ✆ **214/823-8235.** Main courses $6–$16. Tues–Sat 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–9pm.

**Matt's Rancho Martinez** (Value) (Kids) TEX-MEX In the gently bohemian Lakewood neighborhood east of downtown, Matt's is a Tex-Mex favorite—the real deal. Simple and relaxed, with a nice patio dining area, it's Texan to the core, and laid-back as all get out (though it can get pretty noisy when the margarita-drinking hordes descend). Start with great chips and salsa, of course (or the renowned Bob Armstrong queso dip—stir the ingredients), and move on to the chiles rellenos topped with green sauce, raisins, and pecans. If you're not big into Tex-Mex, try the chicken-fried steak: Matt's version of the classic Texas dish even found its way into the pages of *Gourmet* magazine. Matt's has 10 different types of fajitas, grilled specials such as quail, and a dozen daily lunch specials, bargains at $7.25 (Mon–Sat and all day Tues).

6312 La Vista Dr. (at Gaston; Lakewood Theater Plaza). ✆ **214/823-5517.** Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses $8–$17. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

## Uptown & Oak Lawn

### Very Expensive

**Bob's Steak & Chop House ★★** STEAK Consistently ranked one of the top steakhouses in the country, Bob's—back up and running after a recent fire—has the requisite masculine look down: dark and clubby with mahogany booths and crisp white table linens. But its steaks set it apart. Bob Sambol serves monster portions of wet-aged (a difference that steak connoisseurs will recognize), corn-fed Midwestern prime beef and sirloin filets. And they come accompanied by "smashed" potatoes, heavy on butter, bits of chopped onion, and a honey-glazed whole carrot. That adds up to a ton of food. The porterhouse weighs in at 28 ounces; the signature, though, is a 20-ounce, bone-in prime rib broiled like a steak. Other entrees worth considering include a perfect rack of lamb, veal chop, and lobster. And the chophouse salad—mixed greens with cucumber, tomato, bell pepper, onion, bacon, and hearts of palm—is splendid. Bob's is a bit homier than other big-time steakhouses; even though it gets plenty of businessmen in suits and boots, if you're not wearing a jacket, you won't feel out of place—especially in the back room, where diners don denim. Serious cigar smokers are in luck, especially if they catch one of Bob's cigar dinners in which every course is served with a different cigar. Popular outposts of Bob's are now located in Plano (North Dallas) and even—heaven forbid!—San Francisco.

4300 Lemmon (at Wycliff). ✆ **214/528-9446.** Reservations required. Main courses $20–$49. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm.

**Fearing's ★★★** NEW SOUTHWESTERN/NEW AMERICAN Dean Fearing made a name for himself—perhaps the most famous name among Dallas chefs—in 21 years at the Mansion on Turtle Creek, where he was one of the kingpins of haute Southwestern cooking. When he left that comfortable home for his own, eponymous and exceedingly elegant restaurant ensconced within the sparkling new Ritz-Carlton hotel, it was obvious he was aiming high. His aim has proved sharper than ever, and Fearing's is the most talked-about restaurant in town, with plenty of expected Texan swagger. Two bars have become destinations: Rattlesnake Bar, the more old-money watering hole, and the outdoor Live Oak bar, a magnet for younger movers and shakers. There are four distinct dining areas, each with its own flavor and flair: the bustling Dean's Kitchen; the more refined Gallery; the charming, glass-walled Sendero, beneath a gorgeous Murano chandelier; and the outdoor Oaso patio (diners' wishes are generally accommodated). Some of Fearing's southwestern standards made the trip, including his famed tortilla soup. But there are Asian-inflected menu items, including a scrumptious soy-glazed black cod, and inventive ones, like Nilgai antelope on a sauté of black truffles, cabbage, and wild boar sausage, that signal that Fearing's isn't about the past. It's about one of the most spectacular dining experiences one can have in Big D, even if only part of that is about the food.

2121 McKinney Ave. (in the Ritz-Carlton, Dallas). ✆ **214/922-4848.** www.fearingsrestaurant.com. Reservations required. Main courses $26–$48. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs 6–10:30pm; Fri–Sun 6–11pm; Sun brunch 11am–3pm. DART Light Rail: Akard.

**Mansion Restaurant at Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek ★★★** NEW AMERICAN/INTERNATIONAL The Mansion—which has undergone several

important changes in recent years, one of which was adding a mouthful of a name—remains one of Dallas's biggest and best splurges, though it must now compete with the likes of Southwestern star chefs Stephan Pyles and Dean Fearing (formerly at the helm here) for the attentions of the local and visiting glitterati. The big news at the Mansion (can we still just call it that?) is that Southwestern cuisine, which had run its high-end course, is no longer king; a new executive chef, John Tesar—a Yankee, born and bred in New York—has replaced all but the signature lobster tacos and tortilla soup. The restaurant is still high glam all the way, but it's gone more cosmopolitan; the four sleekly contemporary dining areas, a product of a massive interior renovation, reflect the change in outlook. Fresh seafood flown in daily is a focus, as are fresh local ingredients and East Coast items Tesar surely can't live without, such as Hudson Valley foie gras, and poached Maine lobster on a bed of sweet corn pudding with corn-and-white-truffle foam. Meat lovers will be happy to find braised short ribs served with chipotle mac and cheese and chanterelles. This represents a big change in Big D, but one that people appear to be ready for. Committed foodies should opt for a tasting menu in the Chef's Room (the three-course prix-fixe is a comparative steal), or step up to the sybaritic, unforgettable experience of a big-ticket, no-menu meal personally devised by Tesar at the Chef's Table, which seats just six. The new relaxed attitude is evident in the dress code: Jeans are now welcome. Brunch remains a good value and a low-key way to sample the restaurant.

2821 Turtle Creek Blvd. (off Cedar Springs Rd.). ✆ **214/443-4747.** Reservations required. Main courses $22–$55; prix-fixe tasting menus $89–$125. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2pm; Sun 11:30am–2:30pm; Sun–Thurs 6–10pm; Fri–Sat 6–11pm.



## Expensive

**Adelmo's Ristorante ★** (Value) TUSCAN A charming, traditional, and down-to-earth Italian eatery occupying a cute two-story house tucked into a nexus of high-end design and furnishings shops, as well as a bevy of upscale bars and restaurants, family-owned Adelmo's is a refreshing and unexpected find in the Knox-Henderson corridor, which is obsessed with being chic. Adelmo's may not be fashionable, but it is as cozy and friendly as it looks, with excellent, personal service, and a good value to boot. It's one of the few restaurants where entrees still come with a dinner salad. Classic dishes include homemade pastas, of course, and *osso buco.* I recently took my mom here for dinner, and we enjoyed stuffed mushrooms and gnocchi, pork loin medallions Florentine, and a Gorgonzola-crusted buffalo rib-eye. The wine list has some delightful finds and good deals. Dallas has plenty of restaurants hoping to be the next big thing, but Adelmo's is content to be cool in its own skin.

4537 Cole (at Knox). ✆ **214/559-0325.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $16–$39. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

**Trece Mexican Kitchen & Tequila Lounge ★** GOURMET MEXICAN This modern and sleek upto wn restaurant and tequila bar—with more than 120 different tequilas on offer—cultivates a buzz among fashionable scenesters, but there's more to Trece than meets the eye. There's plenty to look at, including the patrons, but the sophisticated, haute Mexican and Latino cuisine aims higher than the restaurant's superficial appeal. Indulge or ignore the nightclub ambience, whichever your preference, and focus on the food, including delectable ceviches, guacamole prepared at your table, and chipotle-braised short ribs. Dishes more than stand up to the color-shifting LED screens, wenge wood, and high decibels. But a sedate evening this will not be. If it gets too noisy, ask for the tequila menu and join the fun.

4513 Travis St. ✆ **214/780-1900.** www.trecerestaurant.com. Reservations required. Main courses $18–$32. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Wed 5–10pm; Thurs–Sat 5:30pm–midnight; Sun 11am–10pm.

## Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants in Dallas

**Fireside Pies** (p. 100) This is no '50s pizza parlor. In a funky, energetic atmosphere, parents and kids can enjoy pecan wood-fired pies made from a creative list of fixin's and cheeses.

**Highland Park Pharmacy** (p. 101) This old-time soda fountain and lunch counter serves the food a kid and nostalgic parent should love: grilled-cheese sandwiches and chicken salad, followed by a milkshake or root beer float.

**La Calle Doce** (p. 95) This cheery, brightly painted Mexican home is sure to delight the kids. The parents can sample affordable but well-prepared seafood dishes, while the kids pig out on enchiladas and other familiar Tex-Mex.

**La Duni La tin Cafe** (p. 100) Latin American *tortas* and more are offered at this eclectic spot. Save room for dessert—their sweets are excellent.

**Matt's Rancho Martinez** (p. 96) Tex-Mex the way it was meant to be—simple and relaxed. The kids can start with the chips and salsa while Mom and Dad sip a margarita on the patio.

**Peggy Sue BBQ** (p. 101) An inexpensive, down-home, 1950s-style barbecue joint in a stylish neighborhood, Park Cities (near SMU). It has a more varied menu than most barbecue places, with a terrific salad bar and veggies.

**Sonny Bryan's Smokehouse** (p. 101) Kids may wonder if they're really on vacation when they sit down to eat at a one-armed school desk at this atmospheric little shack, but the beef sandwich with barbecue sauce, a heckuva sloppy Joe, should keep them from squirming.

**Taco Diner** (p. 100) Though it's a hipster location for good, authentic Mexico City tacos, this is also a clean, family-friendly place to dabble in Mex rather than Tex-Mex, and the service is almost as fast as fast food.

### Moderate

**Bread Winners Café & Bakery** Value AMERICAN/BAKERY With tables outside under trees on a relaxed patio fronting McKinney Avenue, and a display case full of scrumptious desserts just inside the door—not to mention a name promising exactly little else—it would be easy to think of this charming spot as a place for a quick lunch or dessert and coffee. But step back into the gardenlike series of dining rooms and you'll find a more serious restaurant, one specializing in well-executed American dishes with very fresh ingredients. In the warrenlike house that was once the legendary Andrew's (where I had a memorable first date with my wife eons ago), built around an enclosed courtyard, the restaurant is transformed into a romantic, easygoing dinner affair—still a great spot for a date after all these years. Pork loin Briand is excellent, and vegetarians will be pleased by a veggie menu (on request) as well as a long roster of pastas and salads. Of course, if all you want is a burger (okay, smoked-apple-bacon-Gorgonzola burger) or any of the couple dozen sandwiches for lunch, or one of those diet-busting desserts, Bread Winners is a winner at that, too. The weekend brunch is a perennial favorite.

Additional locations are at Inwood Village, 5560 W. Lover's Lane (✆ **214/351-3339**), and 4021 Preston Rd. (✆ **972/312-9300**) in Plano.

3301 McKinney Ave. (at Hall). ✆ **214/754-4940.** Reservations recommended weekend nights. Main courses $12–$28. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7am–4pm; Wed–Sat 5–10pm; Sun 9am–3pm and 5–10pm. DART Light Rail: Cityplace.

**La Duni Latin Cafe** ★ (Kids) LATIN AMERICAN/BAKERY How cool is a restaurant that has its own "artisan" car wash next door? Pretty cool, I'd say. One of my favorite spots to hang out in Dallas, this extremely popular place tr ots out extremely fresh, carefully prepared, and tasty versions of favorites from across the Americas. Although it may be best known among sweet tooths for its sinful desser ts and pastries, it 's also a terrific spot for lunch and dinner (and br unch on weekends). Good appetizers include the stuffed *arepa* (corn *masa* patty) and *empanadas criollas* (stuffed turnover pastries). Great for lunch are the array of yummy *tortas* (Latin sandwiches). And classic entr ees include *pollo al aljibe,* quite a bit fancier than I' ve had in Cuba, and grilled *asado* (chimichurri-marinated beef). Desserts are not to be missed; the sweet and moist *cuatro leches* cake is nearly famous, but I'm just as fond of the cupcakes and triple-chocolate tr uffle cake. S lickly attractive, La Duni's fantastic cocktails, such as the famed margarinha and the mojito, also draw aficionados and give it a bit of a bar scene in the evening. Children will feel at home in the relaxed atmosphere, and they'll surely enjoy some of the simpler items on the menu, such as chicken-and-cheese enchiladas and quesadillas. But their eyes will really light up when they see the dessert counter. Brunch is a deservedly popular affair. Look for a new La Duni Latin Kitchen in NorthPark Center, a great pit stop during shopping excursions.

4620 McKinney Ave. (just north of Knox). ✆ **214/520-7300.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $7.50–$24. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11am–5pm; Sun– Thurs 5–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5–10:30pm; Sat–Sun brunch 9am–3pm; Tues–Sun tea 3–5pm.

**Taco Diner** (Value) (Kids) MEXICAN/TACOS Squeaky-clean and cleanly modern, with cool leather booths and color ful chairs, this new spot is a hybrid of an upscale Mexico City *taquería* and American fast-food pit stop . Sure, the ser vice is fast and the food is simple and good, but the place is too fr esh and too popular with Dallas's community of hip young professionals to be the kind of fast-food joint the prosaic name would imply. The house specialty is, of course, tacos—of the gourmet, soft v ariety. The spicy fish tacos, as well as those made with beef and marinated grilled por k, are all excellent. Although tacos are the way to go, there are also enchiladas and less-expected numbers such as Oaxacan *sopes,* corn patties fried with *frijoles* (beans), and salad and meat. There are several other locations, including one in P lano at 7201 B ishop Rd. (✆ **469/241-9945**).

3699 McKinney Ave. (in West Village shopping center), Ste. 307. ✆ **214/521-3669.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $8.25–$17. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. DART Light Rail: Cityplace.

## Inexpensive

**Fireside Pies** ★ (Kids) PIZZA While Fireside serves up the best New York–style pizza in Dallas, locals talk about this funky , casual, and energetic place in the r evered tones usually used for fine dining—which means it 's packed ev ery night. They don't take reservations, so that often means you're in for a wait. But hang in there and have a beer, because the wait is worth it. The hand-stretched, pecan-wood-fired pies are spectacularly fresh and scr umptious, as well as monstr ous in size. They use a "heavy-handed" cheese blend of mozzarella, fontina, fontinella, and P armegiano Reggiano. Picking faves from

the creative list is hugely difficult, though the Peta Pie (goat cheese, portobello mushrooms, arugula, roasted red peppers, and roasted pinyon nuts) has my name all over it. There are also great fresh salads (also huge) and grinders, and beer by the pitcher, a compact wine list, and a full range of cocktails and soda floats. Whether you're inside the plant-filled main room or out on the patio, you'll be in good company, with a crowd of cheerful regulars. Its success has led to expansion, and there are now locations at 7709 Inwood Rd. (✆ **214/357-3800**) and in Plano at 5717 Legacy Dr. (✆ **972/398-2700**).

2820 N. Henderson Ave. (east of Central Expwy.). ✆ **214/370-3916.** www.firesidepies.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $9–$13. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5pm–midnight.

**Highland Park Pharmacy** (Finds) (Kids) LUNCHEONETTE/SODA FOUNTAIN It's sad that most places like this have disappeared across the country. Amazingly, this one, in Dallas since 1912, is still here, blissfully out of place with all the home-goods and high-end restaurants that surround it. An authentic slice of Americana, this old-time soda fountain and lunch counter (and, yes, pharmacy) has stood its ground, even as everything around it has become an ultrachic bar, restaurant, or home-furnishings store. If you've got a hankering for a grilled pimento cheese sandwich, homemade chicken salad, or a limeade, chocolate milkshake, or root beer float, this is the place; just grab a bar stool. It's a good spot for breakfast, too. Just don't ask the soda jerk for a latte or other fancy fixin's.

3229 Knox St. (at Travis). ✆ **214/521-2126.** Reservations not accepted. Dishes $3–$9. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–6pm; Sat 9am–5:30pm.

**Peggy Sue BBQ** (Value) (Kids) BARBECUE Though this comfy, casual, cheery place looks like it's been around forever, it only opened in 1989 (albeit on the spot where a local barbecue haunt did exist since the 1940s). If it looks and feels like a neighborhood spot—though somewhat incongruous in fancy Park Cities—stuck in midcentury mode, well, that's exactly the way the owners would have it. With meats smoked on the premises, and a salad bar and a full roster of delicious fresh vegetables (choose three for a meal), it's a perfect place to bring hungry carnivores, the kids, and even vegetarians. Parents will appreciate the inexpensive kids' menu, which comes with a veggie the kids may even eat. Brisket quesadillas and onion rings are great starters for the table; adventurous sorts can try the Texas Torpedoes (cream cheese filled, batter-fried jalapeños). Terrific sandwiches include the chopped brisket and Piggy Soo (pulled pork), while full-meal standards (served with two veggies) worth a bet are the smoky baby back ribs and Polish kielbasa sausage. If you can make it to dessert, '50s-style heaven awaits: fried pies, peach cobbler, and root beer floats.

6600 Snider Plaza (at Hillcrest). ✆ **214/987-9188.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $6–$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–9pm; Fri–Sat 11am–10pm.

**Sonny Bryan's Smokehouse** ★ (Finds) (Kids) BARBECUE Barbecue is serious business down here. Everybody's got a favorite, whose merits they'll defend like it was the Alamo, but just about all Dallasites agree that legendary Sonny Bryan's is the original, the one barbecue spot you've gotta visit before you leave Dallas. Dating from February 1910 (when it was in Oak Cliff), the ramshackle little building in a humble section of Oak Lawn is so popular that even on scorching hot days, you'll see businesspeople with their sleeves rolled up, leaning against their cars, trying in vain not to get barbecue sauce all over themselves. Inside the smoke shack, there are just two rows of tiny one-armed school desks, under signs that read reserved, phyllis, or little jerrie. Place your order for

hickory-smoked brisket, meaty ribs, sliced beef sandwiches, and juicy "handmade" onion rings at the counter. Then grab a bottle of sauce in a mini–Mexican beer bottle and a fistful of napkins, and squeeze into a desk—or grab a spot at one of the picnic tables in the parking lot (or, heck, jump on the hood of your car). Come early, though; Sonny's is open only until the food runs out, which is apt to happen before the stated closing time. If you can't make it to the atmospheric original, there are more consumer-friendly branches of Sonny Bryan's serving up the same great and sloppy barbecue across Dallas and the suburbs, and while they're great for fast barbecue, they don't have anywhere near the authentic appeal of the original.

2202 Inwood Rd. (near Harry Hines Blvd.). ✆ **214/357-7120.** Reservations not accepted. Dishes $4–$11. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 10am–4pm; Sat 10am–3pm. DART Light Rail: Medical/Market Center.

## EXPLORING DALLAS

Dallas has long been better known for its business and banking instincts than its cultural treasures and must-see attractions—in fact, Fort Worth still gallops ahead of it on the cultural radar (though the world-class Nasher Sculpture Center and other prominent local collectors donating valuable works to the city, as well as the stunning, $340-million **Dallas Center for the Performing Arts,** slated to open in fall 2009, ought to finally put Dallas on the arts map). Yet plenty of visitors simply come to Dallas and go native: Shop during the day, eat, drink, and attend big-time sporting events at night and on weekends. Big D, a young city, can certainly entertain visitors for a few days or more: It has its infamous Kennedy legacy (which it has reluctantly decided to embrace), revitalized state fairgrounds, a growing arts scene, and a handful of parks and enjoyable places for the kids. And, of course, the shopping.

### The Top Attractions

#### Historic Downtown Dallas

**Dallas County Historical Plaza** Just a couple of blocks from the spot where JFK's motorcade slowly rolled by the Texas School Book Depository is the heart of historic downtown Dallas—though nothing of permanence was built here until the 1890s. In the middle of the plaza is a reminder of Dallas's recent origins as a Western outpost: **John Neely Bryan Cabin,** a replica of the one-room log structure built by the Tennessee-born attorney credited with founding the city in 1841. The original cabin stood on the banks of the Trinity River.

Across Main Street is the **John F. Kennedy Memorial,** funded by private donations and designed by the famed architect Philip Johnson in 1970. The open-roofed square room, made of limestone, is a "cenotaph" (an empty tomb), according to Johnson. Unfortunately, the memorial is also empty of emotion—not the moving testament to a president and event that so marked the American national psyche. Inside the four solemn walls is a black marble slab, which looks like a low coffee table, engraved with the words john fitz gerald kennedy. Johnson's intent was for the open roof to symbolize the "freedom of spirit of JFK," but I doubt that many visitors will feel their own spirits soar here.

Just west of the Kennedy Memorial, across Record Street, is the **Old Red Courthouse,** built in self-important Romanesque Revival style in 1890 on the site of the original log courthouse (property donated by city founder John Neely Bryan). The blue granite and red sandstone building today houses the **Dallas Visitors Center** (which has Internet access, and sightseeing and hotel and restaurant information).

### Tips Picnic Places

Dallas isn't really the kind of place with great public spaces ideal for mounting a picnic lunch. Mostly it's either too hot or too cold, and people stick to their offices and cars. However, picking up some foodstuffs on your way over to the **Dallas Arboretum** and **White Rock Lake** is a fine idea. One of the best places to pick up some healthful eats is **Whole Foods Market,** 2218 Greenville Ave. at Belmont (✆ **214/824-1744**). The market, which started in Austin, has a great selection of fruits, vegetables, cheeses, and breads, as well as a cafe serving prepared foods and sandwiches. A superb gourmet takeout market is **Eatzi's,** 3403 Oak Lawn Ave. (✆ **214/526-1515**), which has made inroads into New York City and stocks literally thousands of items, including dozens of prepared entrees and enough cheeses to make a Frenchman weep. The time to go is after 9pm, when the day's prepared foods that have to go are half-price.

Occasionally, true nonbelievers still hang around the Texas School Book Depository trumpeting far-fetched, wacky, and occasionally plausible tales about the JFK assassination to anyone who will listen.

Junction of Main, Market, Elm, and Record sts. No admission fees for memorial. Memorial open year-round daily 24 hr. DART Light Rail: West End.

**The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza** ★★ Kids November 22, 1963, is a day Dallas can't live down and the world can't forget. A sniper assassinated the nation's 35th president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, in Dallas as his motorcade traveled west on Elm Street. Whether or not there was a single shooter or more camped out on the grassy knoll below, and whether or not the Cubans or the Russians or the CIA were involved, the Warren Commission concluded that 24-year-old Lee Harvey Oswald fired his rifle at least three times from a window perch on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, killing JFK and critically injuring the Texas governor, John Connally. (Oswald had days earlier secured a menial job at the School Book offices.)

The redbrick building overlooks Dealey Plaza, an otherwise unremarkable spot that is ingrained in the memory of most Americans and people across the globe. The museum, the top draw in North Texas, preserves the spot where Oswald crouched and fired his rifle (now encased in Plexiglas), but it also examines the life, times, and legacy of the Kennedy presidency. The exhibit provides a moment-by-moment account of the day of the assassination and a day-by-day recollection of that harrowing November week. The display, which includes documentary film footage and more than 400 photos, summons the "Camelot" White House before getting to the event that put Dallas on the quivering lips of people across the globe. On view are images from the famous Zapruder film, whose frames have been isolated and examined more than any footage in history. However, there is no original evidence on display; everything examined by the Warren Commission forms part of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The JFK assassination has been so hashed over and occupies such a place in pop culture that few visitors are likely to discover much in the way of new information. It is, however, a place to revisit the tragic episode, as children's drawings from the period and visitor remarks inscribed in "Memory

**Moments** **At the Top of the Tower**

Dominating the Big D skyline is sphere-topped **Reunion Tower** (✆ **214/651-1234;** DART Light Rail: Union), the top of which is lit up like a giant pincushion at night. The tower, located in Reunion Park at Reunion Boulevard, rises 50 stories, and the dome rotates very slowly (completing a single rotation in just under an hour), though imperceptibly to the naked eye. Take an exterior elevator to an observation deck for panoramic views of the city and surrounding plains, or have a drink at the Top of the Dome cocktail lounge, where you can blame your spinning head on something other than the libations in front of you.

Books" at the museum's exit attest. Unless the information here is new to you or you want to relive the episode in great detail, spending no more than a couple of hours here should be plenty.

**Dealey Plaza,** which draws two million curious visitors annually, remains a stark public square at the junction of a triple underpass, virtually unchanged from 4 decades ago. A red X marks the spot on the asphalt of Elm Street where Kennedy was struck; incredibly, many visitors to Dallas feel compelled to dodge traffic and have their pictures taken while standing on the X as cars hurtle by. Unless you really want to follow in the footsteps of JFK, however, I strongly advise against such reckless participation in our nation's history.

411 Elm St. at Houston (entrance on Houston St.). ✆ **214/747-6660.** www.jfk.org. Admission (including audio guide) $14 adults; $13 seniors, students, and children 7–18; free for children 6 and under. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; Mon noon–6pm. Closed Thanksgiving and Dec 25. DART Light Rail: West End.

## The Arts District

Art lovers will want to spend the better part of a morning or afternoon in the Arts District, though you could do a drive-by through a couple of the museums in a little over an hour. To get there via public transport, take DART Light Rail to Pearl or St. Paul station.

**Dallas Museum of Art ★** Though always considered a notch below a world-class institution, the Dallas Museum of Art significantly improved its standing within the art world when it recently received the undeniably world-class modern and contemporary art collections of three prominent local collectors (the Hoffmans, the Rachofskys, and the Roses); the collections, gifted together in an unprecedented deal, totaled more than 800 works as well as future acquisitions. The I. M. Pei–designed museum also contains impressive collections of international art, especially from the Americas, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. The Arts of the Americas section is the largest and most impressive, with valuable contributions from pre-Columbian lost civilizations of the Aztec, Maya, and Nazca peoples and Spanish colonial arts. The more limited Art of Europe gallery exhibits a handful of works by the biggies—van Gogh, Monet, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Degas—while the small 20th-century collection includes Picasso, Mondrian, and Giacometti, among others. The contemporary collection includes works by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, the Texan Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns. In the Wendy & Emery Reves Collection is a curious re-creation of Coco Chanel's French summer home, complete with her collection of furnishings and paintings by such French Impressionists

as Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Degas. The DMA mounts interesting occasional shows, including "Van Gogh's Sheaves of Wheat" and the blockbuster "Splendors of China's Forbidden City" exhibit. In the atrium, where jazz combos play for free on Thursday evenings, hangs a gorgeous, monumental blown-glass sculpture by Dale Chihuly. A couple of hours should be sufficient, unless you're a dedicated art hound.

1717 N. Harwood (at Ross St.). ✆ **214/922-1200.** www.dallasmuseumofart.org. Admission $10 adults, $7 seniors, $5 students, free for children 11 and under, free to all Thurs evenings after 5pm and 1st Tues of every month. Special exhibits $16 adults, $14 seniors, $12 students, $8 children 6–11. Joint admission tickets to the Dallas Museum of Art and the Nasher Sculpture Center $16 adults, $12 seniors, $8 students. Tues–Wed and Fri–Sun 11am–5pm; Thurs 11am–9pm. Open until midnight on 3rd Fri of the month. Guided tours Sat–Sun at 2pm; "gallery talks" Wed at 12:15pm and "art talks" Thurs at 7pm.

**Nasher Sculpture Center** ★★★ Kids Despite its status as the principal art museum in a city of considerable wealth, the rather modest permanent collection of the Dallas Museum of Art is proof that either North Texans don't collect much great art or they don't donate it on a grand scale to local institutions. One notable exception to that rule is Raymond Nasher, one of the world's foremost collectors of contemporary sculpture. A local businessman, by way of New York, who made his banking and real estate fortune in Dallas (with the shopping mall NorthPark Center, among other properties), Nasher decided, after years of being wooed by the Dallas Museum of Art as well as such major institutions as the Guggenheim Museum in New York and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., to establish a public sculpture garden in his adopted city. The $50-million project was entirely funded by the private Nasher Foundation.

The **Nasher Sculpture Center** opened in 2003 on a 2 1/2-acre site adjacent to the Dallas Museum of Art, in a glass-and-marble structure infused with natural light, designed by the renowned architect Renzo Piano. The center should change the way art aficionados think about Dallas and make it an art destination. The collection, which includes high-quality pieces by virtually all of the great modern masters and was amassed over 4 decades by Ray and his wife, Patsy, is considered by some art experts to be the finest private sculpture collection in the world. The tasteful 54,000-square-foot center, a place of quiet refuge in downtown Dallas, features an outdoor sculpture garden landscaped by Peter Walker, with pieces from Nasher's immense collection exhibited both indoors and out. The collection includes some of the finest individual works from the likes of Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, Joan Miró, David Smith, Constantin Brancuşi, Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti, Henri Matisse, Alexander Calder, Isamu Noguchi, Richard Serra, Mark di Suvero, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Joseph Beuys, Roy Lichtenstein, and many others. Among the monumental pieces in the open-air museum, there are too many highlights to mention, though James Turrell's "skyspace" *Tending (Blue)* perhaps deserves special recognition as a site-specific piece commissioned for the museum. At the back of the garden, near the bathrooms, it is a walk-in box open to the sky, with optical effects and an unexpected perspective. One of the newest acquisitions in the Sculpture Garden is Jonathan Borofsky's 2004 *Walking to the Sky,* which depicts seven life-size figures defying gravity and climbing a 100-foot pole that reaches toward the clouds. Although the Nasher Sculpture Center—which has some of the biggest names in art and architecture attached to it—opened with big publicity and truly ought to be one of Dallas's most highly prized treasures, it has had some difficulty attracting visitors, especially locals. In an attempt to draw a wider range of potential art lovers, the museum is now free on the third Thursday night of the month (6–11pm), when it stages "salons" on topics of popular culture and urban living and opens up the NB ar,

## Downtown Dallas's Outdoor Sculpture

Fans of monumental contemporary sculpture should, after visiting the Nasher Center and the outdoor sculpture garden at the Dallas Museum of Art, pick up the ***Walking Sculpture*** brochure (available at the Visitors Center), which details 33 outdoor public sculptures in the downtown area. Along the way you'll find works by Richard Serra, Ellsworth Kelly, Mark di Suvero, and Henry Moore. On the first Saturday of each month, a guided walking tour is offered, departing from the Crow Collection of Asian Art (see below) at 10:30am. Call ✆ **214/953-1977** for required reservations and more information.

with cocktails and DJs spinning tunes. Among a smart, cultured set, it's becoming a hip downtown thing to do on Thursday nights. If you're at all a fan of modern art, or even of contemporary architecture, don't miss the opportunity to see this spectacular museum.

2001 Flora St. (btw. Harwood and Olive sts.). ✆ **214/242-5100.** www.nashersculpturecenter.org. Admission (which includes audio tour) $10 adults, $7 seniors, $5 students, free for children 11 and under. Joint admission tickets to the Nasher Sculpture Center and the Dallas Museum of Art $16 adults, $12 seniors, $8 students. Daily 10am–6pm (until 9pm on Thurs).

**Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art** ★ This exceptionally displayed collection is the product of one of Dallas's best-known real estate developers' fascination with the arts of Japan, China, and India. The 500 pieces on display (taken from a collection of more than 7,000 objects) range from 1000 b.c. to the 20th century. The first floor is dedicated to the arts of Japan; its galleries hold Japanese scrolls and screens, as well as ceramics and bronzes. The Chinese galleries focus mostly on painting, sculpture, and decorative arts from the last Chinese empire, the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Across a sky bridge is the third gallery, dedicated to Indian culture, with Hindu sculptures and features of Indian architecture, including a large residence facade in elaborately carved red limestone. There are also a number of sculptures from Cambodia—a standout is the pre-Khmer 7th-century figure of Vishnu—and Nepalese and Tibetan objets d'art. Allow an hour or two to see it all.

Crow's non-Asian sculpture collection is on display at the **Trammell Crow Center,** located at 2001 Ross Ave. at Harwood. It includes 19th- and 20th-century French bronzes (by Rodin and Maillol) throughout the office building and in the garden.

2010 Flora St. (btw. Harwood and Olive sts.). ✆ **214/979-6430.** www.crowcollection.com. Free admission. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm (Thurs until 9pm). Free guided public tours Sat–Sun 1pm. Audio tours ($5) also available and gallery talks ($10) regularly scheduled.

### The Outskirts of Downtown: Historic Parks, Fairgrounds & Museums

**The Dallas Arboretum & Botanical Garden** ★ Kids Dallas may not be celebrated for its cool green beauty, but the area around White Rock Lake, and more specifically the Arboretum and Botanical Garden, is a welcome oasis. Just 15 minutes from the gleaming skyscrapers of downtown Dallas are nearly 70 acres of carefully planted and groomed gardens and natural woodlands, interspersed with a handful of historic residences, that

meander along the banks of the lake. The Jonsson Color Garden features one of the nation's largest collections of azaleas, which bloom spectacularly in spring, and nearly 6 acres of chrysanthemums in the fall. And while North Texas is not exactly New England, October and November are as ablaze in color as anything you'll see in this neck of the woods. If you find yourself in Dallas during the torrid summer (or spring and fall) months, the Palmer Fern Deli is a secluded, shady spot where mist-sprayers drop the temperature at least 10° to 15°—reason enough for a visit here. An hour is probably enough time to see most of the gardens, though it's a fine place to linger, read, and relax.

8617 Garland Rd. (Tex. 78). ✆ **214/515-6500.** www.dallasarboretum.org. Admission $8 adults, $7 seniors, $5 children 3–12, free for children 2 and under. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Parking $5.

**Dallas Heritage Village** ★ (Kids) Dallas's Old West heritage is on self-conscious display in this downtown 13-acre park of three dozen historic buildings. The complex re-creates a late-19th-century village, complete with a redbrick Main Street, Victorian homes, a log cabin dating from 1847, and Old West standards such as a train depot, general store, one-room church, schoolhouse, bank (said to have been robbed by Bonnie and Clyde in the 1930s), and law offices. All have been transported from their original locations in and around Dallas, immaculately restored and reconstructed on the attractive grounds, which have the glittering city skyline as a backdrop. Guided tours escort visitors inside several of the buildings, including a "Living Farmstead," a re-creation of a North Texas farm (ca. 1860). On selected dates during the first 2 weeks of December, the village celebrates Candlelight at Old City Park, a popular "Victorian Holiday Celebration." (Candlelight admission tickets are $3 more than regular prices.)

A pretty good restaurant, Brent Place, occupies an 1876 "architecture catalogue" farmhouse (ordered by mail and shipped by rail to rural areas) and serves lunch Tuesday through Saturday from 11am to 3pm; call ✆ **212/421-3057** for reservations. Visitors are allowed to picnic on the grounds. Plan to spend 1½ hours or so here.

1515 S. Harwood. ✆ **214/421-5141.** www.dallasheritagevillage.org. Admission mid-Sept to Dec and mid-Feb to mid-June $7 adults, $5 seniors, $4 children 3–12; mid-June to mid-Sept and Jan 2 to mid-Feb $5 adults, $4 seniors, $3 children 3–12. Tues–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun noon–4pm (buildings closed Mon, but grounds remain open). DART Light Rail: Cedars.

**Fair Park** ★ (Kids) Fair Park, a classic conglomeration of Art Deco buildings and spacious grounds built for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition, is undergoing a renaissance. Built to commemorate the Republic of Texas's independence from Mexico, it is the only intact and unaltered, pre-1950s world's fair site in the United States. Recognized as a National Historic Landmark for its architecture (the only such landmark in Dallas), Fair Park is an attraction year-round, but especially so during the annual State Fair of Texas (last weekend of Sept and first 3 weeks of Oct).

The 277-acre grounds include several museums and performance and sporting facilities like the State Fair Coliseum, Cotton Bowl, Fair Park Bandshell, and Starplex Amphitheater, one of the city's top concert venues. The two major areas are the Esplanade and the Lagoon. There's much to see and do at Fair Park, so depending on your time, you may have to pick and choose. Plan on 2 or 3 hours minimum, and a full day during the State Fair of Texas. Below are the highlights:

The **Women's Museum: An Institute for the Future** ★, 3800 Parry Ave. (✆ **214/915-0860;** www.thewomensmuseum.org), is a huge coup for Dallas. The pet project of a trio of Texas women and designed by Wendy Joseph, the chief designer behind the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., this exciting $25-million museum is an ambitious,

## Fair Park Passport

Get in to seven Fair Park Museums for a single price, a savings of 40% over retail admission prices, with the newly inaugurated **Fair Park Passport,** available by calling ✆ **214/428-5555** or logging on to www.fairpark.org. Tickets are $24 for adults and $14 for children ages 3 to 12. Participating museums are the African American Museum, the Hall of State, the Museum of the American Railroad, the Science Place, the Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park, Texas Discovery Gardens, the Museum of Nature and Science, and the Women's Museum.

high-tech architectural feast, audacious enough to encompass the accomplishments of women over the past century.

The museum presents two dozen mostly interactive exhibits, with a clear predilection for engaging the visitor with technological wizardry. Audio guides (hand-held cellphones) feature the voices of "mentors" Connie Chung, Gladys Knight, and the late Texas governor Ann Richards. "It's Amazing" is a glass labyrinth of female stereotypes, behind which are revealed several women who defied convention; "Mothers of Invention" showcases popular inventions by women (such as Liquid Paper, conceived by a Dallas secretary, and the brown paper bag). The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from noon to 5pm. Admission is $5 for adults, $4 for seniors and students ages 13 to 18, and $3 for children ages 5 to 12.

The **Hall of State,** 3939 Grand Ave. (✆ **214/421-4500;** www.hallofstate.com; Tues–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; free admission), is the centerpiece and principal Art Deco legacy at Fair Park. Inside is a Texan's dream, the Hall of Heroes, with larger-than-life (as any Texan will tell you they were in real life) stalwarts of the Republic of Texas, including Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin. Venture into the four-story-high Great Hall, yet more proof that bigger is always better in Texas.

Trains evoke nostalgic feelings of travel and exploration in just about everyone; the collection at the **Museum of the American Railroad,** 1105 Washington St. (✆ **214/428-0101;** www.dallasrailwaymuseum.com), including 28 locomotives, steam-era Pullman passenger cars, and Dallas's oldest surviving train depot, is sure to feed such impulses in visitors of all ages. The entry in the "Bigger in Texas" sweepstakes? Big Boy, the world's largest steam locomotive. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10am to 5pm; admission is $5 for adults, $2.50 for children; guided tours are $7.

The **African American Museum,** 3536 Grand Ave. (✆ **214/565-9026;** www.aamdallas.org), is the only museum in the Southwest (and one of eight in the country) that focuses on the African-American experience and culture. The standout exhibit is the fine collection of African-American folk art, supplemented by a survey of African art objects and contemporary African-American art. Admission is free; it's open Tuesday through Friday from noon to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from 1 to 5pm.

The **Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park,** 1300 Cullum Blvd. (✆ **214/670-8443;** www.dallaszoo.com), which contains a small but diverse collection of marine life, is currently closed for renovations, but will reopen in 2010. When it does, it will again highlight some of the weirder aquatic specimens in the marine and freshwater world, including walking fish, four-eyed fish, upside-down jellyfish, and desert fish. And who can resist watching the

piranhas and sharks being fed? The newest and largest addition is the Amazon Flooded Forest, a 10,000-gallon tank with 30 species from the Amazon River. Normal hours are daily from 9am to 4:30pm; admission is $4 for adults, $3 for children ages 3 to 11.

The **Museum of Nature and Science,** 3535 Grand Ave. (✆ **214/428-5555;** www.natureandscience.org), is the former Dallas Museum of Natural History now merged with the Science Place and IMAX theater. Families can view the kind of wildlife that roamed Texas before steers and longhorns, namely , dinosaurs, and explore permanent exhibits like Paleontology Lab and Prehistoric Texas. You can also entertain the kids with more than 300 hands-on science exhibits—such as lifting a half-ton with one hand or playing with electricity—and the massive, domed IMAX theater. The Planetarium features stargazing shows Monday through Saturday.

The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 5pm, Sunday from noon to 5pm; admission is $8.75 for adults, $7.75 for seniors, $5.50 for children ages 3 to 12. Admission to the planetarium shows is $4 for all, while IMAX screenings are $7 for adults, $6 for seniors and children ages 3 to 12. Combo-pack tickets for all exhibits, including one IMAX screening, are $15 for adults, $13 for seniors, and $11 for children ages 3 to 12. Parking is free.

3809 Grand Ave. (bordered by S. Fitzhugh, Washington, and Parry aves., and Cullum Blvd.). ✆ **214/670-8400,** or 421-9600 for museum and event information. www.fairpark.org.

**Meadows Museum of Art** ★★ Finds On the campus of Southern Methodist University is one of the city 's best-kept secrets: the finest collection of Spanish art outside Spain (so significant, in fact, that it has been exhibited at the top-tier Thyssen-Bornemisza museums in Madrid and Barcelona). A Dallas oil magnate, Algur Meadows, went to Spain to search for oil, entertaining himself at the Prado Museum. He came up dry, but his sojourn into Spanish art history bore fruit: Meadows began to assemble a splendid collection of works from the 15th to the 20th century, including pieces by Spanish masters from the Golden Age of Spanish painting (such as Velázquez, Goya, Ribera, Murillo, Zurbarán—just about the only big name missing is El Greco). Having moved into a new building six times larger than the old site, Meadows Museum is one of the best small museums with a singular focus in the U.S. Of special note among the nearly 700 items on display are Ribera's *Retrato de un Caballero de Santiago* and Goya's *El Corral de los Locos* (by many accounts the finest Goya found in the U.S.), as well as a series of 200 works on paper by Goya. The 20th-century Spanish masters Picasso, Dalí, Miró, and Tàpies are also represented.

Owens Fine Arts Center, SMU Campus, 5900 Bishop Blvd. (1 block north of Mockingbird Lane, west of I-75). ✆ **214/768-2516.** www.meadowsmuseumdallas.org. Admission $8 adults and students, free for children 11 and under; free Thurs after 5pm. Tues–Wed and Fri–Sat 10am–5pm; Thurs 10am–8pm; Sun noon–5pm. Free public tours Sept–May Sun 2pm and occasional Sun in summer. DART Light Rail: Mockingbird.

**Swiss Avenue Historic District** Toward the turn of the 20th century, the Dallas elite began to abandon the area that now comprises the Arts District and move east (near the modestly funky Lakewood neighborhood). Sprawling, grand homes from the early 1900s—English Tudor, Georgian, Spanish, you name it—line a broad avenue, about 4 blocks of which are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Wilson Blocks (2800 and 2900), named for Frederick Wilson, who built a number of the homes there, are especially attractive. Around the holidays, Swiss Avenue is a favorite for Christmas lights cruisers. A drive-by can be done in 15 minutes; allow a half-hour if you want to stroll.

Northeast of downtown, along Swiss Ave. bt w. La Vista Dr. and Fitzhugh Ave. (take Fitzhugh east from I-75).

## More to See & Do

**The Dallas World Aquarium** (Kids) Housed in a former warehouse in the West End district, the Dallas aquarium *not* at Fair Park is a good place to hide out from the sun downtown. My niece and nephew enjoy communing with the stingrays, sea turtles, sharks, and reef fish. Their favorite, though, is "Orinoco—Secrets of the River," an immersion into the tropical rainforest of Venezuela, a cool area teeming with Peruvian squirrel monkeys, endangered Orinoco crocs, jaguars, and soft-billed toucans. The newest exhibit is "Mundo Maya," with a 400,000-gallon shark tank. Plan on about an hour's visit. A restaurant and a cafe are on the premises.

1801 N. Griffin (West End District). ✆ **214/720-2224.** www.dwazoo.com. Admission $19 adults, $15 seniors, $11 children 3–12, free for children 2 and under. Daily 10am–5pm. DART Light Rail: West End.

**Dallas Zoo** (Kids) If you're headed west to Fort Worth and one zoo trip will do, you'd be better off waiting (the Fort Worth Zoo and the one in San Antonio are the two best in Texas and two of the best in the country). Otherwise, if the kids are clamoring for some wild animals, the recently renovated Dallas Zoo—the oldest zoo in Texas, founded in 1888—isn't likely to disappoint (indeed, one exhibit, "Wilds of Africa," was named the top African zoo exhibit in the country by *The Zoobook: A Guide to America's Best*). The sprawling 95-acre park also features a habitat for rare Sumatran tigers, a chimpanzee forest, and a monorail safari ride. A couple of hours spent here should suffice for the kids.

650 S. R. L. Thornton Fwy. (in Oak Cliff, 3 miles south of downtown Dallas). ✆ **214/670-5656.** www.dallas-zoo.org. Admission $10 adults, $7 seniors, $7 children 3–11, free for children 2 and under. Daily 9am–4pm. Parking $5. DART Light Rail: Dallas Zoo.

## Especially for Kids

Older children who have studied the 1960s and Kennedy should appreciate the **Sixth Floor Museum.** Younger kids are likely to have a better time at the **Dallas Zoo** or either the **Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park** or the **Dallas World Aquarium.**

**Fair Park** has plenty to offer families, especially if you happen to be in Dallas during the State Fair of Texas (Oct). Even if you miss the fair, Fair Park's **Museum of Nature and Science** is a great place to hide from the Texas sun. Girls of all ages (and open-minded boys) may find interactive inspiration at the new **Women's Museum.** Kids tend to like trains, so a whistle-stop at the **Age of Steam Railroad Museum** should be diverting.

The staging of life on the prairie at **Old City Park,** with actors re-creating the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is plenty of fun for both kids and adults. Check out family theater productions at the **Dallas Children's Theater,** Crescent Theater, 2215 Cedar Springs at Maple (✆ **214/978-0110**). The Dallas Museum of Art's **Gateway Gallery** has cool interactive art displays for kids. Children who are into movies may want to check out Hollywood sets and memorabilia at the **Studios at Las Colinas.**

The **Plano Balloon Festival,** a 3-day event held in mid-September in Oak Point Park, 2801 E. Spring Creek Pkwy., is one of the country's largest. More than 100 hot-air balloons, many of them curious shapes and recognizable figures, launch each day at 7am and 6pm. It's worth the drive (and early rise), unless it's too windy to launch; call ✆ **972/867-7566** or visit www.planoballoonfest.org for more information. **Sporting events,** such as games of the Cowboys, Rangers, Sidekicks, and Stars, draw huge family crowds. Finally, just getting around parts of Dallas can be fun for children; take the

**DART Light Rail system** around downtown (especially direct to the Dallas Zoo) and be sure to hop aboard the historic **trolleys** that patrol McKinney Avenue.

Arlington, midway between Dallas and Fort Worth, is the big draw for families, with **Six Flags Over Texas** amusement park, **Texas Rangers baseball** (including the excellent Legends of the Game Baseball Museum), **Hurricane Harbor** water park, the **Palace of Wax & Ripley's Believe It or Not,** and more. And if you're looking to combine shopping with entertainment for the kids, Texas malls are in themselves theme parks (with skating rinks and much more). See "Arlington," later in this chapter.

## Organized Tours

**Gray Line/Coach USA** (✆ **800/256-4723;** www.grayline.com) is the big daddy of bus tours. It offers at least six themed sightseeing tours in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. A full complement of sightseeing tours of Dallas and Fort Worth is also handled by a local company, **All In One Tour Services** (✆ **214/698-0332;** www.allinonetourservices.com).

**Dallas Surrey Services,** 381 E. Greenbriar Lane (✆ **214/946-9911**), offers horse-drawn carriage tours of historic Dallas 7 nights a week, weather permitting. Standard tours originate in the West End and visit Dealey Plaza and the Texas School Book Depository, Pioneer Plaza, and the Arts District, lasting about 20 minutes ($30 for up to four people). Longer, custom tours can last up to an hour ($100, four people). **Belle Starre Carriages** (✆ **214/855-0410**) also offers horse-drawn tours of downtown Dallas, including Christmas Light Tours through Highland Park during the month of December, starting at $165 per carriage.

Hour-long, free **Walking Arts District Strolls** covering the zone's art and architecture are conducted the first Saturday of every month at 10:30am, leaving from in front of the Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, 2010 Flora St. Call ✆ **214/953-1977** for additional information and reservations.

## Outdoor Activities

**BIKING, IN-LINE SKATING & JOGGING** White Rock Lake, 5 miles east of downtown Dallas (off Loop 12), is the most popular area for cycling, skating, and running (and, of course, walking). A 12-mile loop traces the banks of the lake. The park is open from 6am to midnight, though I wouldn't advise hanging about too long after dark falls. Nearby bike and skate shops offer rentals.

**GOLF** North Texas, where such golf legends as Byron Nelson, Ben Hogan, and Lee Trevino hail from, has a huge number of golf courses, from challenging championship courses to comfortable courses suited to players of all stripes. **TPC at the Four Seasons Resort and Club** (✆ **972/717-2400;** www.fourseasons.com/dallas/golf; greens fees $150), home of the PGA Byron Nelson Classic, is the best and most spectacular course in the area—but you'll have to stay at the Four Seasons to play (see p. 93 for a full review). Another hotel golf course, rated among the top 50 resorts in the United States, is **Bear Creek Golf Club,** 3500 Bear Creek Court/DFW Airport (✆ **972/456-3200;** www.bearcreek-golf.com; greens fees and cart $25–$69, with twilight reduced rates available), featuring two nicely designed championship 18-hole courses on 355 acres of rolling hills.

The City of Dallas operates several courses open to the public. The newest addition is **Keeton Park Golf Course,** 2323 Jim Miller Rd. southeast of downtown Dallas off I-30 (✆ **214/670-8784;** www.keetonpark.com), which has pecan tree–lined fairways

and numerous ponds. Greens fees are $16. **Tenison Golf Course,** 3501 Samuell Blvd. (✆ **214/670-1402;** www.tenisonpark.com), just 5 miles east of downtown, has two 18-hole courses divided by White Rock Creek. Greens fees are $14 to $34, on weekends $17 to $42.

Local duffers (as well as football fans) rave about the **Cowboys Golf Club,** 1600 Fairway Dr., in Grapevine (✆ **817/481-7277;** www.cowboysgolfclub.com; greens fees all-inclusive VIP package $140, twilight play $75), which is certainly unique: Not only does it boast huge changes in elevation, but it claims to be the "world's first NFL-themed golf course." The clubhouse is packed with Dallas Cowboys memorabilia and Super Bowl trophies, and markers along the course pay tribute to key moments in Cowboys lore. Named among the "Best Places to Play" by *Golf Digest* (and rated one of the top five public courses in Texas) is **Buffalo Creek Golf Club,** 624 Country Club Dr., Rockwall (✆ **972/771-4003;** www.buffalocreek.americangolf.com), near Lake Ray Hubbard, a healthy drive from Dallas. Greens fees, including cart and range balls, are $69 Monday through Friday, $89 Saturday and Sunday. One of the most difficult courses is **Sleepy Hollow Country Club,** 4747 S. Loop 12 (✆ **214/371-3433**), just 10 minutes south of downtown, which is private but allows the public to play as guests. Greens fees (with cart) are $27 to $42, $13 less to walk.

Golf fanatics who like to imagine themselves winning the Masters or British Open may want to venture north of Dallas and Fort Worth, to Flower Mound, Texas, where the **Tour 18 Dallas** course reproduces 18 of the best-known holes in golf (from courses such as Winged Foot and Augusta National). The course, 8718 Amen Corner, Flower Mound (✆ **800/946-5310** or 817/430-2000; www.tour18-dallas.com), is west of I-35E and 121. Greens fees are $65 to $140.

**TENNIS** Even though tennis in Dallas is mostly confined to swank (and off-limits) private tennis clubs, there are several public courts where visitors can play a few sets. The following are city-owned but have privately run pro shops: **Fair Oaks,** 7501 Merriman Pkwy. (✆ **214/670-1495**), near White Rock Creek (4 miles north of White Rock Lake), has 16 lighted courts; **Fretz Park,** 14700 Hillcrest (✆ **214/670-6622**), where I took lessons as a kid, has 15 lighted courts.

## Spectator Sports

Dallas is sports-mad, one of only six cities in the U.S. to support teams in all the major professional sports leagues. Tickets to pro sporting events are available from **Central Tickets** (✆ **817/335-9000**), **Star Tickets** (✆ **972/660-8300**), and **Ticketmaster** (✆ **214/373-8000**).

**AUTO RACING** For information on the Texas Motor Speedway, see the "Auto Racing" entry in the Fort Worth section of this chapter (p. 149).

**BASEBALL** The **Texas Rangers** (formerly owned by the former president of the U.S., George W. Bush) play from April to October at one of the finest stadiums in the country, **Rangers Ballpark in Arlington,** I-30 at Hwy. 157 (✆ **817/273-5100;** www.texasrangers.com), a home field that recalls the glory days of baseball. Of special interest is the fascinating **Legends of the Game Baseball Museum,** with rare pieces on loan from the Cooperstown Baseball Museum (the only stadium so fortunate). See p. 121 for additional information.

The **Frisco RoughRiders** (✆ **972/334-1909;** www.ridersbaseball.com), the Texas Rangers feeder team, play minor league at the new stadium at Highway S. 12 between Dallas North Tollway and Parkwood Boulevard.

## Packin' Heat, Texas-Style

The right to own, use, and brag about firearms is a protected birthright in Texas. I'm not necessarily advocating this—I mean, personally I think it's a little odd that the local concealed-gun law allows Texans to take their pistols to church on Sunday, and museums have to post signs that warn "No Firearms"—but heaven knows I wouldn't dare offend gun owners. If you want to play Texan while in Big D, what better way than to fire off a few rounds? If that's your idea of R & R, the **DFW Gun Club & Training Center,** 1607 Mockingbird Lane (✆ **214/630-4866;** www.dfwgun.com), operates the DFW Gun Range for a little indoor shooting. Featured hilariously in the film about Borat, the fictional reporter from Kazakhstan, the club offers shooting instruction and even concealed handgun license classes.

**BASKETBALL** The **Dallas Mavericks** (✆ **214/747-MAVS** [747-6287] or 665-4797; www.nba.com/mavericks), one of the top teams in the NBA, call the American Airlines Center home. The excellent arena, built by the same architect who created the critically acclaimed Rangers Ballpark in Arlington for the Texas Rangers, opened in July 2001. Single-game tickets (available at Ticketmaster, ✆ **214/373-8000**) are $20 to $250 and can be a bit hard to come by, as popular as the Mavs are at home. Tours of the arena are available on nonevent days at 10:30am.

**FOOTBALL** The **Dallas Cowboys** (✆ **972/785-4800;** www.dallascowboys.com), five-time Super Bowl Champions and (at least formerly) "America's Team," played at **Texas Stadium** in Irving, the arena with the famous hole in the roof, for 38 years. In 2009, the Cowboys' new stadium is scheduled to open; it will seat 80,000 and be the largest domed stadium in the country—and it will still have a hole in the roof, although this time around it will be retractable. Individual game tickets, which cost $59 to $125, aren't easy to come by, so plan ahead if you want to avoid paying high broker's fees. The **Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders,** who started a professional trend of scantily clad females bouncing around on the sidelines, still shimmy and cheer them on, big hairdos, cleavage, and all. Check with the Cowboys organization to find out whether and when tours of the new stadium are available. The **Dallas Desperados** play arena football (AFL) in the spring at American Airlines Stadium in Irving; call ✆ **972/785-4900,** or visit www.dallasdesperados.com for information.

**GOLF** The PGA **Byron Nelson Championship,** named for a local legend, has been held in Dallas for the past 3 decades every May. Check out some of the top names in professional golf at the **Four Seasons Resort and Club** (call ✆ **972/717-1200** for tickets).

**HOCKEY** Dallas may not seem like the most logical place for a professional ice hockey team, but Big D has one of the best, the **Dallas Stars** (the 2000 Western Conference Champions), and Dallasites are wild about them. The Stars play at the American Airlines Center; the season is September through April. The Stars sell out all of their home games, so plan ahead if you want to see a game (✆ **214/GO-STARS** [467-8277]; www.dallasstars.com). Tickets (available at Ticketmaster, ✆ **214/373-8000**) range from $25 to $300, and family packs (tickets and food) are available.

**RODEO** One of the top rodeos in Texas, and a huge draw for out-of-town ers and travelers from abroad, is the **Mesquite Championship Rodeo,** about 20 miles northeast

 of downtown at Resistol Arena, 1818 Rodeo Dr. (✆ **800/833-9339** or 972/285-8777; www.mesquiterodeo.com). A pril to S eptember, y ou can check out some authentic professional r odeo action—bull riding, saddle and bar eback riding, calf r oping, and chuck-wagon races—on Friday and Saturday nights at 8pm (reserved grandstand seating $14; general admission $10 adults, $7 seniors, $4 children 11 and under). Animal-rights sympathizers might feel a bit squeamish watching some of the r oping exercises, which violently snap calv es' heads back. There's a petting z oo for kids and a gift shop selling Western duds just like the ones the cowboys and their fans will be sporting. Rodeo season is April through October.

**SOCCER** The newest professional team in the ar ea, **FC Dallas,** plays outdoor soccer (MLS). Confer ence champions in 2006, FC D allas mo ved fr om the Cotton Bo wl to Pizza Hut Park in Frisco, 30 miles north of Dallas, and draws more than 1.5 million fans to its 20,000-capacity stadium. The season lasts fr om April to O ctober. Tickets cost $9 to $60. Call ✆ **888/FCD-GOAL** (323-4625) or visit http://w eb.mlsnet.com/t104 for more information.

## SHOPPING

In Big D, shopping isn't merely a mundane chore necessary to outfit yourself, your kids, and your home. Shopping is a spor t and a pastime, a social activity and enter tainment. Dallasites don't pull on sweats and go incognito to the mall; they get dolled up and strut their stuff. Having grown up in N orth Dallas, I know all too w ell that locals ar e world-class shoppers. E very time I r eturn home, I initially hav e a har d time ev en finding my way around—retail outlets, mostly national chain stor es, seem to continually r eproduce like a computer vir us, blanketing all four corners of ev ery intersection in the bedr oom communities that env elop Big D. The Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau likes to tout that ther e are mor e shopping oppor tunities per capita in D allas than in any other city in the United States. So if you're a shopper, and come from a place less rich in r etail mania, you've got your work cut out for you.

If you need to focus your shopping attention, incline it toward Western duds (especially Texas-made cowboy boots) and upscale clothing and accessories (this is the home of world-famous Neiman Marcus, after all). Texans aren't fond of taxes (there's no state income tax, still), but there is a state sales tax, and it's one of the highest in the countr y: 8.25%.

### Great Shopping Areas

Downtown Dallas largely has been eviscerated of shopping outlets as inhabitants flocked to the suburbs. Only Neiman Marcus, the mother of all Dallas purveyors of luxury goods, has stayed put. The **West End MarketPlace** (www.dallaswestend.org) was carved out of an old candy and cracker warehouse to draw hungry tourists and get things going downtown. The real high-volume shopping is done nor th of do wntown, in **Uptown** as w ell as **Highland Park, North Dallas** (north of LBJ Fwy.), and **suburbs** such as Plano and Frisco. The best spot in Plano is the chic **Shops at Legacy (Legacy at the Toll Road).**

In the area that real estate agents have designated **Uptown,** a vintage tr olley line travels along McKinney Avenue, allo wing shoppers to jump off to duck into its many antiques shops, ar t galleries, furnitur e stor es, r estaurants, and specialty shops. **West Village** is an outdoor, European-style mall full of chic shops, restaurants, bars, and a movie theater at the north end of M cKinney Avenue. The str eets Kno x and H enderson, bisected b y Central Expressway, are lined with home-furnishing stor es and antiques dealers, with an eclectic

decoration shop or two mixed in. Routh and Fairmount streets have a large number of art galleries and antiques shops. **Greenville Avenue** is home to a dizzying array of funky shops, including antiques dealers and vintage clothing stores. The avenue gets a little funkier the farther south you travel, with Lower Greenville in particular home to plenty of bars and restaurants that make great pit stops. **Deep Ellum,** which rules the alternative night, is loaded by day with offbeat furnishings stores, art galleries, folk-art shops, and vintage resale shops. Of course, locals head straight for the malls, and if you're in Dallas doing some big-volume shopping, you might do the same; the best are listed below.

## Native to Big D

**Neiman Marcus** ★★★ (which my father-in-law never tires of calling "Needless Markups"), established in 1907, is a local institution; its annual holiday catalog has become part of pop culture (a once-a-year opportunity to order "His & Her Mummies" or perhaps your own personal $20-million submarine). Beyond those attention-grabbing stunts, Neiman Marcus remains one of the classiest high-end retail stores around, and its downtown flagship store has a chic retro look that is suddenly very hip today. It's not to be missed, even if you can't fritter away your rent money on a pair of Manolo Blahniks. The downtown store, a beauty of retro 1960s style at 1618 Main at Ervay Street (✆ **214/741-6911;** www.neimanmarcus.com), is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 5:30pm; stores in the NorthPark and Prestonwood malls are open on Sunday.

Another department store where customers are dripping in diamonds and their drivers wait outside to gather the bags is **Stanley Korshak** ★, in the Crescent Court hotel (suite 500) on McKinney Avenue between Maple and Pearl (✆ **214/871-3600**). **Forty Five Ten** ★★, 4510 McKinney Ave. (✆ **214/559-4510**), is a rarefied, upscale, chic Uptown emporium with one-of-a-kind fashion, jewelry, and home decor items. Though it's plenty glitzy, for Dallas the 8,000-square-foot shop almost qualifies as understated; it's a terrific place if you're looking for something unique.

Dallas is an especially good place to pick up Western wear—boots, hats, shirts, and belts—whether you want to look the part of a real cowboy or prefer the more adorned "drugstore cowboy" look. Boots of all leathers and exotic skins, both machine- and hand-made, from Texas boot companies (Justin, Tony Lama, Nocona) are good deals in Dallas. You can even order custom-made boots if you've got a grand or so to burn. Compare pricing at any of the following, all of which have excellent selections, and be sure to ask about proper boot fit: **Boot Town,** 5909 Belt Line Rd. at Preston (✆ 972/385-3052; www.boottown.com), or 2821 LBJ Fwy. at Josey Lane (✆ 972/243-1151); **Wild Bill's,** West End MarketPlace, 3rd floor (✆ 214/954-1050); **Cavender's Boot City,** 5539 LBJ Fwy. (✆ 972/239-1375); and **Western Warehouse,** 2475 Stemmons Fwy. (✆ 214/634-2668), or 10838 N. Central Expwy. at Meadows (✆ 214/891-0888). Very fancy Western wear can be found at **Cowboy Cool** ★, in the West Village at 3699 McKinney Ave. (✆ 214/521-4500); it's the place to go if you want to drop $500 on a Western shirt or a grand on a pair of boots. Vintage Western clothing can be a bit hard to come by. **Ahab Bowen,** 2614 Boll St. (✆ 214/720-1874), occasionally stocks vintage Western shirts, along with one of Dallas's best selection of other carefully chosen items for both men and women. Another cool vintage shop is **Artfunkles Vintage Boutique,** in the West Village at 3699 McKinney Ave., Ste. C311 (✆ 214/526-5195). **Ragwear,** 200 Greenville (✆ 214/827-4163), is a laid-back vintage store that stocks collectible Western shirts at $100 and up, as well as more pedestrian models. (If you're headed to Fort Worth, there are several excellent Western wear stores clustered around the Stockyards; see "Shopping"

 in Fort Worth, later in this chapter.) Fancy gift items for the upscale cowboy—sterling silver money clips, Michel Jordi wristwatches and belt buckles with longhorns and state-of-Texas and cowboy insignias, and the like—can be had for a price at **Bohlin,** 5440 Harvest Hill, Ste. 172 (✆ 972/960-0335; www.bohlinmade.com).

**Dallas Farmers' Market** ★, 1010 S. Pearl Expwy. (✆ **214/939-2808**), spread over 12 acres just south of downtown Dallas, is one of the nation's largest open-air produce markets. First opened in 1941, it looks across at the glittering Dallas skyline. Farmers from around the area sell directly to the consumer. The market is open daily from 7am to 6pm.

## Department Stores & Malls

It would be impossible to cover Dallas's dozens of major shopping malls here—and more difficult still to hit them all on your visit to Dallas. Following are a few of the best, both for the number and quality of stores and for their general ambience.

**NorthPark Center** ★★, Northwest Highway/Loop 12 at I-75 (✆ **214/363-7441**), is the most traditional mall and, to my mind, the most elegant. NorthPark has 160 shops and major anchor stores (including Neiman Marcus, Tiffany's, and Nordstrom), as well as natural lighting and, best of all, a rotating display of owner Ray Nasher's fabulous sculpture collection of modern masters throughout the mall (the majority of his collection can be seen at Nasher Sculpture Center). NorthPark recently underwent a makeover that doubled its size, making it the largest mall in the Metroplex, but respected the good taste of the original 1960s structure. Not a mall, but not far from NorthPark, is one of my favorite shopping stops in Dallas: the sprawling flagship store **Half Price Books Records & Magazines** ★★ at 5915 E. Northwest Hwy., just east of Central Expressway (✆ **214/363-8374**). The massive selection of books—including art and architecture books, coffee-table books, books on tape, and language books—blows away almost any new bookstore, and everything is at half-price or less.

**Highland Park Village** ★★, Mockingbird Lane at Preston Road (✆ **214/559-2740**), is as close as you'll get to Beverly Hills' Rodeo Drive in Dallas. This ultrachic corner of high-end shopping in the midst of Dallas's most exclusive neighborhood was built in the 1930s—it was reportedly the first shopping mall in the U.S.—and sports an eclectic mix of today's most fashionable boutiques (such as Calvin Klein, Prada, Chanel, Bottega Veneta, and Hermès). Shops aren't enclosed like at a traditional suburban American mall; rather, they face inward for a more enjoyable (or shall we say, European) shopping experience.

The **Galleria,** LBJ Freeway and Dallas Parkway North (✆ **972/702-7100;** www.dallasgalleria.com), is a huge mall with a light-filled atrium (said to mimic the original Galleria in Milan, Italy). It attracts some of Dallas's most sophisticated shoppers to Macy's, Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue, Versace, Cartier, and Hugo Boss. You'll also find an ice-skating rink, a Westin Hotel, and a host of restaurants—but many people seem to come just to stroll.

## BIG D AFTER DARK

Dallas has a lively nightlife scene, with enough in the way of performing arts and theater to entertain highbrows and more than enough bars and clubs to satisfy the young and the restless. If you've come to North Texas to wrangle a mechanical bull, you may have to drop in on Fort Worth, but there are a couple of sturdy honky-tonks in Big D where you can strap on your boots and your best Stetson and do some two-steppin' and Western swing dancing.

### Tips Ticket Central

For tickets to sporting events and performances, try **Central Tickets** (✆ **800/462-7979** or 817/335-9000; www.centralticketoffice.com), **Star Tickets** (✆ **888/597-STAR** [597-7827]; www.startickets.com), or **Front Gate Tickets** (✆ **888/512-7469;** www.frontgatetickets.com). For many events, there's little need to secure tickets in advance of your trip, but that's not the case with big sporting and musical performances.

## The Performing Arts

The **Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center** ★★, 2301 Flora St. at North Pearl (✆ **214/670-3600;** www.dallassymphony.com), is home to the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, a very respectable outfit led by maestro Andrew Litton. The I. M. Pei–designed auditorium is equipped with excellent acoustics and a spectacular pipe organ. Tickets to events are as little as $12, and free concerts are occasionally held. (Free tours are available on selected days at 1pm; call in advance for schedule.) The **Dallas Opera** currently performs at Campbell Center #1, 8350 N. Central Expwy. (✆ **214/443-1043;** www.dallasopera.org), though the arts world in Dallas is buzzing with anticipation for the new **Winspear Opera House** ★★★, a red horseshoe within a glass box, designed by Sir Norman Foster, to open as part of the $340-million **Dallas Center for the Performing Arts,** in the heart of the Arts District, in the fall of 2009. Another major international architect, Rem Koolhaas, is adding an intimate but futuristic theater tower to the complex: the **Wyly Theater** ★★★ is scheduled to be completed around the same time. The **Dallas Theater Center** ★, Kalita Humphreys Theater, 3636 Turtle Creek Blvd. (✆ **214/526-8210;** www.dallastheatercenter.org), is a little gem, the only professional working theater built by the famed American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and the best place for theater in the Dallas area. Local and touring productions, some fairly adventurous by Dallas standards (like *Angels in America*), are on the card here. The ornate, nicely restored **Majestic Theater,** 1925 Elm St. (✆ **214/880-0137**), built in 1920, is the last of the vaudeville theaters in Dallas. It plays host to dance, comedy, and theater, including the Dallas Summer Musicals' Majestic Series. Less traditional theater is performed by the acclaimed **Kitchen Dog Theater Company,** 3120 McKinney Ave. (✆ **214/953-1055**). Of interest to families may be the shows put on by the **Dallas Children's Theater,** 2215 Cedar Springs (✆ **214/978-0110;** www.dct.org). A new venue hosting Latin-themed cultural events, including theater, dance, and music, as well as art exhibitions, is the colorful **Latino Cultural Center,** 2600 Live Oak (at Good Latimer) (✆ **214/670-3320**).

## Live Music

The biggest continuing news in live music, dance clubs, and bars is the decline—indeed, near death—of **Deep Ellum,** the rowdy district east of downtown, after a quarter-century as the epicenter of live music and late-night dance clubs. The one-time nightlife destination fell victim to a sustained spate of unsettling gang violence, bar fights, robberies, occasional shootings, and mismanaged clubs. Venerable stalwarts of the Dallas scene, including Trees, Club Clearview, Gypsy Tea Room, and Deep Ellum Blues, all have gone under in the past couple years. For those young daredevils who still wish to

live on the edge in Deep Ellum, a free shuttle service for barhoppers runs throughout Deep Ellum on Fridays and Saturdays from 6:30pm to 2:30am. Still hosting national touring acts of alternative and roots-based rock and country is the spacious **Sons of Hermann Hall** ★, 3414 Elm St. (✆ **214/747-4422**), a classic Texas dance hall that's equal parts pickup bar, live music venue, and honky-tonk, hosting rock, country, and occasional rockabilly acts (and swing dance classes on Wed); but like many classic Texas dance halls of its era, it's on the endangered list. **The Bone,** 2724 Elm St. (✆ **214/744-2663**), is ostensibly a blues club, but, much more than that, it is a crowded, sweaty drinking spot for young and rowdies. **Double Wide,** 3510 Commerce (✆ **214/887-6510**), recently reopened with new owners, is a funky music club with a southern twist; it's the place to go if you want to get your trailer park on, with Lone Star beer, gimme caps, and live, loud rock music.

Christian music and culture is picking up some of the Deep Ellum void. For live, all-ages (really all-ages—if you're 9 and under, you get in free!) rock and pop gigs, including emo (short for *emotional*) punk rock and Christian acts (sometimes a whole slew of bands in a single night), check out **The Door,** 2513 Elm St. (✆ **214/742-DOOR** [742-3667]), now in the old Gypsy Tea Room theater space.

The **Palladium,** in what was the main room of Gilley's, 1135 S. Lamar St. (✆ **972/854-5050;** www.thepalladiumballroom.com), is somewhere between a club and a large concert hall, with good lighting, sightlines, and sound for midsize rock, country, and alternative acts (such as the Black Crowes). It contains a very intimate space (capacity 300) called **The Loft.** In Victory Park, just north of downtown, the slick new **House of Blues Dallas,** 2200 N. Lamar St. (✆ **214/978-2583**), is no ordinary juke joint; it's a 60,000-square-foot complex with a large concert hall, an outdoor patio, and a southern restaurant. Live acts range from blues to soul and rock.

Lower Greenville Avenue has been around forever, and is doing its best to fill the bill for bars and clubs in the wake of Deep Ellum's demise. The **Granada Theater** ★★, 3524 Greenville Ave. (✆ **214/824-9933;** www.granadatheater.com), is a converted old movie theater that now books such popular acts as Bob Dylan and Sigur Rós that also appeal to a somewhat older but still hip crowd. **The Cavern** ★, 1914 Lower Greenville Ave. (✆ **214/828-1914**), is a tiny but cool indie spot that books good alternative acts (such as Devendra Banhart) and has upstairs DJs for those who find the live space too claustrophobic.

Once a dark and ambience-heavy jazz cafe, **Sambuca** ★ has gone thoroughly uptown now that it's in Uptown, at 2120 McKinney Ave. (✆ **214/744-0820;** www.sambucarestaurant.com). A spacious, upscale supper club, it draws a trendy crowd for cocktails, dinner, and live jazz (much of it jazz fusion you can dance to) 7 nights a week. It has another North Dallas branch, also a Mediterranean restaurant, at 15207 Addison Rd. at Belt Line, in Addison (✆ **972/385-8455**). Perhaps Dallas's best club for live jazz is **Brooklyn** ★★, 1701 S. Lamar (✆ **214/428-0025;** www.brooklynjazzcafe.com), which has a big space with an outdoor patio. **Balcony Club,** 1825 Abrams at La Vista (✆ **214/826-8104**), upstairs from the Landmark (movie) Theater, is a cool, dark spot with intimate booths, perfect for some relaxing beats and a drink. It has live jazz nightly. **Poor David's Pub** ★ (✆ **214/565-1295**), a venerable old club whose stage has been graced by many great Texas singer-songwriters (such as Guy Clark), is smoke free and occupies decidedly not poor digs at 1313 S. Lamar, near Gilley's (see below). It aims to retain some of the old ambience, and provides a platform for live jazz and blues, albeit with slightly greater capacity.

**Dallas Alley,** in the West End, Munger Avenue at Marker Street (✆ **214/720-0170**), is a touristy mix of bars and r estaurants primarily aimed at businessmen enter taining clients and visitors staying in do wntown hotels. F rom karaoke to countr y and oldies clubs, it's one-stop shopping for most gr oups looking for a night out on the te to wn with a vie w of the skyline. D on't count on heaps of local flav or and authenticity , but the drinking and carousing seem contagious for most. The newest and best spot for big-name touring rock and pop acts is **Nokia Live Center** ★, 1001 NextStage Dr., Grand Prairie (✆ **972/854-5050**).

## Dance Clubs

**Lizard Lounge** ★, 2424 Swiss Ave. (at Good Latimer) (✆ **214/826-4768**), is the city's best dance club; tr endy and slightly seedy , but r esolutely sexy, it trades in per colating dance beats and a hot cr owd, with occasional liv e bands. S unday night is G oth Night. For something out of the or dinary—dancing to Tejano and ranchero music, along with what seems like half of D allas's Latino population—check out massiv e **Escapade 2009** ★★, 10701 F innell St. (✆ **214/654-9950**). About 5,000 people get their P an-Latino groove (Tejano, ranchera, rock en Español) on here nightly.

## Honky-Tonk Heaven

**Gilley's Dallas,** a Big D branch of Houston's famous honky-tonk (which shot to fame with John Travolta on a bucking br onco in *Urban Cowboy*), finally opened at 1135 S. Lamar (✆ **888/GILLEYS** [445-5397]). I t is absolutely Texan in siz e, with mor e than 90,000 square feet to accommodate all those boots, hats, and hair. **Cowboys Red River Dancehall** ★★, 10310 Technology B lvd. ( ✆ **214/352-1796**), has liv e countr y music nightly , mechanical bull riding, a huge dance floor , and dance lessons. Worth the driv e if y ou're a boot-scooter or country music fan is the must-see **Billy Bob's Texas** in Fort Worth (p. 152).

For a more intimate, down-and-dirty take on the honky-tonk scene, check out **Adair's Saloon** ★, 2624 Commerce St., in Deep Ellum (✆ **214/939-9900**), which the regulars call "Aayy-dares." It gets its share of clean-scrubbed SMU students, but mostly you'll find down-to-earth patrons and infectious country and redneck rock bands that go down well with the cheap beer, shuffleboard, and tables and walls blanketed in graffiti. The perfectly greasy burgers with a whole jalapeño on top ar e surprisingly tasty; some say they 're the best in D allas. The only r ule here is in plain E nglish on the sign behind the bar: no dancin ' on t ables with spurs.

## The Bar Scene

Many of the hottest spots in D allas are in U ptown. **Cru,** 3699 M cKinney Ave., A306 (✆ **214/526-9463**), is a wine bar and restaurant that features an excellent wine list; most of its patr ons treat it primarily as the former , sampling vintages fr om the many differ ent wine flights on offer. But the see-and-be-seen spot for wealthy Dallasites and visiting celebs (you'll know immediately if you fit in here) is the much-talked-about **Ghostbar** ★ in the new W Hotel, 2440 Victory Park (✆ **214/871-1800**). It's got a helipad tailor-made for scene-stealing arriv als. B efore G hostbar, the "it " nightlife spot was **Dragonfly** ★, 2332 Leonard S t. (✆ **800/597-8399**), at the r estaurant of tr endy H otel Z aZa. O n w eekend nights it is still stuffed to the rafters with guys and gals both busting out of their shirts, but otherwise it's a luxurious spot for a cocktail, such as pr edinner drinks poolside. I f y ou're looking for a quieter but still fashionable spot, venture inside Hotel Lumen, 6101 Hillcrest Ave. (✆ **214/219-8282**), to **Social,** a swank lounge and restaurant that's a haunt of trend-setting nightlife types.

**The Old Monk** ★, 2847 N. Henderson (✆ **214/821-1880**), is a dark, handsome bar 1 block east of Central Expressway with an excellent selection of Belgian beers, single malts, and great pub grub—go with the Belgian mussels with fries and spicy mayo. In Uptown, just off McKinney Avenue, **The Ginger Man,** 2718 Boll St. (✆ **214/754-8771**), has a great beer garden and a beer selection to die for: about 200 beers from around the world, including 70 on tap.

Downtown, if you want to heighten the effect an expensive cocktail has on you, check out the **Dome,** 50 stories aboveground in the revolving Reunion Tower ball, 300 Reunion Blvd. (✆ **214/712-7145**). A step up from karaoke is **Pete's Dueling Piano Bar,** 4980 Belt Line Rd., #200, Addison (✆ **972/726-7383;** www.petesduelingpianobar.com), a rowdy piano bar where four accomplished players tickle the ivories on two baby grands and everybody sings along (enthusiastically) to crowd favorites by the Stones, Beatles, Johnny Cash, and even Eminem.

### The Gay & Lesbian Scene

The **Crew's Inn,** 3215 N. Fitzhugh Ave. (✆ **214/526-9510**), is cruise-happy but caters to the widest, rather than the wildest, common denominator of the gay community (it has angered some by reportedly banning drag queens and transgendered individuals). Another longtime favorite, with a consistently good vibe and a wall of video monitors, is **J. R.'s Bar and Grill,** 3923 Cedar Springs Rd. (✆ **214/528-1004**). **Village Station,** 3911 Cedar Springs Rd. (✆ **214/559-0650**), is a gay dance club that features nightly drag shows in the Rose Room and Trash Disco every Sunday. **Sue Ellen's,** 3903 Cedar Springs Rd. (✆ **214/559-0707**), is a friendly gay and lesbian bar with live rock, a dance floor, and an outdoor patio. **Buddies II,** 4025 Maple Ave. (✆ **214/526-0887**), is tops for lesbians: hot music and SGWF looking for same. Gay country swing and line dancers should check out the **Texas Twisters** (www.texastwisters.org), a group that organizes two-stepping and the like for gays and lesbians around the Dallas area, frequently at the **Round-Up Saloon,** 3912 Cedar Springs Rd. (✆ **214/522-9611**), a gay country bar that has a Monday karaoke night.



## 3 ARLINGTON

Sandwiched between Dallas and Fort Worth, the medium-size city of Arlington has become known as a pro-sports center and the family playground of the Metroplex. If you're a sports fan, or have kids in tow (or are a kid at heart), it makes a good day trip. If none of those applies, you're probably better off in Arlington's bigger and more important cousins. To get to Arlington, take I-30 from either Dallas or Fort Worth. If traffic's heavy, plan on it taking you about an hour from either city. Having your own car is pretty much required to get around to any of the places below.

### Tips Coupon Discounts

In addition to the coupons available in the *Dallas/Fort Worth Area Visitors Guide* (available from tourist information offices), look for the brochure *The Dallas Metroplex: One Exciting Savings Place,* which has coupons worth $10 at Six Flags.

Arlington's **Visitor Information Center** is located at 1905 E. Randol Mill Rd. (✆ **800/342-4305** or 817/461-3888; www.arlington.org).

## THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Louis Tussaud's Palace of Wax & Ripley's Believe It or Not** (Kids) Merged under one roof are now three oddballs of family fun. The Palace of Wax features wax dummies of movie stars and historical figures such as Mother Teresa, Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump, Jesus Christ, and Dorothy and her *Wizard of Oz* pals. Ripley's is a collection of the hard-to-swallow and bizarre, such as the giraffe-necked woman of Burma and the double-eyed man of China. Really small kids may get freaked, but most children 6 and older are likely to find the exhibits pretty cool. The newest attraction is Ripley's Enchanted Mirror Maze. Check out the coupons available online.

601 E. Safari Pkwy./I-30 at Belt Line, Grand Prairie. ✆ **972/263-2391.** www.palaceofwax.com. Admission to single attraction $17 adults, $15 seniors and military, $9 children 4–12, free for children 3 and under. Combination visit to all 3 attractions $28 adults, $26 seniors and military, $18 children 4–12, free for children 3 and under. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Parking $6.

**Rangers Ballpark in Arlington/Legends of the Game Baseball Museum** ★ (Kids) The home of the Texas Rangers professional baseball team is one of the finest ballparks in the country. The graceful, redbrick-and-granite 50,000-seat stadium was designed (by the architect David Schwarz, a favorite in Fort Worth) to echo classic American baseball parks. The flat, painted billboards in the outfield with retro graphics and the absence of glaring neon lend a yesteryear feel to the park. It's a terrific place to see a game, even for folks (like me) who aren't huge baseball fans.

Even if you can't see a Rangers game (Apr–Sept), you can take a 50-minute tour of the park, which visits the dugout, press box, clubhouse, batting cages, and owner's suite, and visit the **Legends of the Game Baseball Museum.** The museum traces the history of baseball in this country, with uniforms and artifacts on loan from Cooperstown, the Hall of Fame Museum. See Joe DiMaggio's glove; the jerseys of Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams, Hank Aaron, and Walter Johnson; and cool antique baseball cards. Upstairs is a neat little Learning Center of hands-on baseball exhibits for Little Leaguers.

1000 Ballpark Way, Arlington. ✆ **817/273-5220,** 817/273-5100 ticket office, or 273-5600 museum. www.texasrangers.com. Joint ballpark/museum admission $12 adults, $10 seniors, $7 children 6–13. Ballpark tours Mon–Sat 9am–4pm. Museum Apr–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–4pm, Sun 11am–4pm (game days open until 7:30pm); Oct–Mar Tues–Sat 10am–4pm. To get there, take I-30 from either Dallas or Fort Worth and exit at Nolan Ryan Expwy./Ballpark Way.

**Six Flags Hurricane Harbor** (Kids) The biggest water park in North Texas is 3 million gallons of water and 50 acres of relief from the Texas sun. The kids will go nuts at such feature attractions as Hook's Lagoon (pirate ships and 12 levels of interactive features), Black Hole (a tentacle-like thrill ride that plunges through dark, wet tubes), and the Bubba Tub (an inner tube ride that begins at the top of a 70-ft. tower). There are a couple of dozen more rides, slides, and pools, including a 1-million-gallon wave pool, to entertain and douse you and your families. Professional lifeguards are on duty.

1800 E. Lamar Blvd., Arlington. ✆ **817/265-3356.** www.sixflags.com. $25 adults; $20 children less than 4 ft. tall, seniors, and visitors with disabilities; free for children 2 and under. Adult ticket deals available online. Mid-May to Aug 22 daily; check website for hours. Parking $7.

**Six Flags Over Texas** (Kids) Now 40 years old, Six Flags is the place I used to dream about going as a kid. The 200-acre amusement park, one of the biggest and best in the country, is the top draw in Texas (and it can be a little crowded on summer weekends). It has Texas-size roller coasters, including the Texas Giant (once the world's tallest wooden coaster that hits speeds of more than 60 mph), Batman the Ride (a suspended looping coaster with six inversions and corkscrew spirals), and Mr. Freeze (one of the fastest and tallest roller coasters in the Southwest). There are also tons of shows, eateries, and nostalgic rides such as the Parachute Drop and the Log Ride, with its peculiar green water that thrilled my little girlfriends and me back in the '70s.

I-30 at Hwy. 360, Arlington. ✆ **817/530-6000.** www.sixflags.com. $50 adults ($31 online), $31 children less than 4 ft. tall and seniors, free for children 2 and under. Mid-May to late Aug daily; Mar to mid-May and Sept–Oct weekends only; check website for hours. Parking $15.

**Trader's Village** A rollicking and locally famous flea market (spread out over 100 acres), Trader's Village has been trading everything under the sun since the early 1970s. It attracts a couple of thousand dealers each weekend and tens of thousands of shoppers searching through the junk for the occasional find. There are also rides and games for the kids.

2602 Mayfield Rd., off Hwy. 360 in Grand Prairie, south of Arlington. ✆ **972/647-2331.** www.tradersvillage.com. Free admission. Sat–Sun 8am–dusk. Parking $2.



## 4 FORT WORTH ★★★

Easygoing Fort Worth has lived for years in the shadow of Dallas, its brash cousin to the east. Yet the city exudes a quiet confidence, reserve, and sense of comfort that are often missing in Big D. And gradually, people are learning that Fort Worth has plenty that Dallasites might envy.

Nicknamed Cowtown, Fort Worth revels in its role as the gateway to the West; the mythic qualities of the American West—wide-open spaces and even grander dreams—are still palpable here. In the mid–19th century, on the heels of the war between Texas and Mexico, Fort Worth began as a frontier army town in the Republic of Texas, assigned with protecting settlers from Native American attacks. The outpost grew into the last major stop along the Chisholm Trail, the major thoroughfare of the great Texas cattle drives that took ranchers and their livestock 500 miles north to the railheads and more lucrative markets of Dodge City and Abilene, Kansas. The trail's importance transformed Fort Worth into a busy trading post. By 1881, more than five million head of cattle had been driven through town on their way to market. Saloons, bordellos, and gambling houses staked out the rough-hewn area of town called "Hell's Half Acre."

With the arrival of the railroad, the stampede of cattle north grew exponentially, and strategically positioned Fort Worth became a place for ranchers to keep their herds before moving them for sale. The Fort Worth Stockyards opened in 1890, followed by the arrival of major meatpacking plants, transforming Fort Worth into a major cattle shipping center and one of the country's top livestock markets. Fort Worth had become a wealthy city, a cow town to be reckoned with. The rise of the oil business in West Texas bolstered Fort Worth's commercial prospects, and oil for tunes replaced the cattle-ranching riches of the early 20th century.

If in frontier days Fort Worth was where the East fizzled out and the West began, today the city is a place where cowboy culture meets high culture. It is probably the most authentically Texan city in the state. The city is home not only to a tenacious pride in its

## Grapevine

One of the oldest settlements in North Texas, Grapevine—north of DFW Airport and wedged between Dallas and Fort Worth—is known for its handsomely restored historic Main Street, the Grapevine Opry, several Texas wineries, and a number of art galleries housed in turn-of-the-20th-century buildings. Downtown there are some 75 historic buildings, including the **Torian Log Cabin,** Liberty Park, 201 S. Main St., and the **1901 Cotton Belt Train Depot.** The **Grapevine Opry,** which inhabits the 1940 Palace Theatre at 308 S. Main St. (✆ **817/481-8733**), holds foot-stomping hootenannies on Saturday nights and features concerts by top-name country stars throughout the year.

The **Grapevine Visitor Information Center** is located at 701 S. Main St. (✆ **800/457-6338** or 817/410-8136; www.ci.grapevine.tx.us). You can pick up information about **wine tours** and tastings at La Buena Vida Vineyards, La Bodega Winery, and North Star Winery.

The best way to visit old Grapevine is by train. The Tarantula Steam Train travels from Stockyards Station in Fort Worth to historic Grapevine; see p. 143 for additional information on this nostalgic locomotive. Otherwise, take Hwy. 114 northwest from Dallas or Hwy. 121 northeast from Fort Worth.



Old West past, and plenty of modern-day cowboys and Western flavor, but also to one of the country's most celebrated cultural scenes. Cultural cognoscenti call it the Museum Capital of the Southwest. Local oil-rich philanthropists have endowed the city with superlative collections of art and hired some of the world's most prestigious architects—Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, and Tadao Ando—to build the esteemed Kimbell, newly expanded Amon Carter, and spectacular new Museum of Modern Art. Fort Worth is also home to a symphony orchestra, an impressive botanic garden, several theater companies, and the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. It turns out that this cowboy town with a rough-and-tumble past has a remarkably sophisticated and arts-minded soul. Even if you come to the Dallas area with little time to spare, Fort Worth—laid-back, historic, friendly, and surprisingly progressive—is absolutely worth a visit. For me, it is the highlight of North Texas.

As if by well-devised plan, Fort Worth's downtown, a charming and dignified center of business and entertainment, is almost perfectly equidistant between the Stockyards National Historic District and the Cultural District. Fort Worth natives may like to keep the essential elements of their city separate, but they seem to recognize that they add up to a cohesive whole.

## ESSENTIALS

### Visitor Information

Besides the DFW Airport Visitor Information (see section 1, earlier in this chapter), the **Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau** (✆ **800/433-5747** or 817/336-8791; www.fortworth.com) maintains tourist information centers downtown on Sundance Square at 415 Throckmorton St. (✆ **817/336-8791**); in the Stockyards National

Historic District at 130 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/624-4741**); and in the Cultural District at 3401 W. Lancaster Ave. (✆ **817/882-8588**). Of the three, only the one in the Stockyards is open Sundays (noon–5pm).

The city's events hot line is ✆ **817/332-2000.**

## City Layout

Fort Worth lies just west of I-35, which runs north-south. Fort Worth for most visitors means three distinct districts, which the city calls the "Western Triangle": the Stockyards National Historic District, 2 miles north of downtown; historic downtown, which includes Sundance Square, just north of I-30, running east-west; and the Cultural District, 2 miles west of downtown. See the "Dallas–Fort Worth" map on p. 76 to help orient yourself.

### THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

**Stockyards National Historic District** This area was the focus of the old cattle-raising and livestock business of Fort Worth. Today the district retains its Old West feel and is where rodeos and Wild West shows take place, as well as daily cattle drives down E xchange Avenue. A handful of hotels and restaurants aimed at visitors are located here, but it's not overly touristy.

**Downtown** Downtown is the center of the Fort Worth business community and includes **Sundance Square,** where much of the city's restaurant, bar, and theater nightlife and most business-oriented hotels are located. Staying in this area is best if you want to get around easily between the Cultural District, the Stockyards District, and downtown.

**Cultural District** Fort Worth's outstanding museums, including the Kimbell, Modern, and Amon Carter, are clustered in the Cultural District. Just south are parks and gardens, including the Fort Worth Zoo and Botanic Garden. Art lovers will want to base themselves here, but the Stockyards District and downtown are better for families.

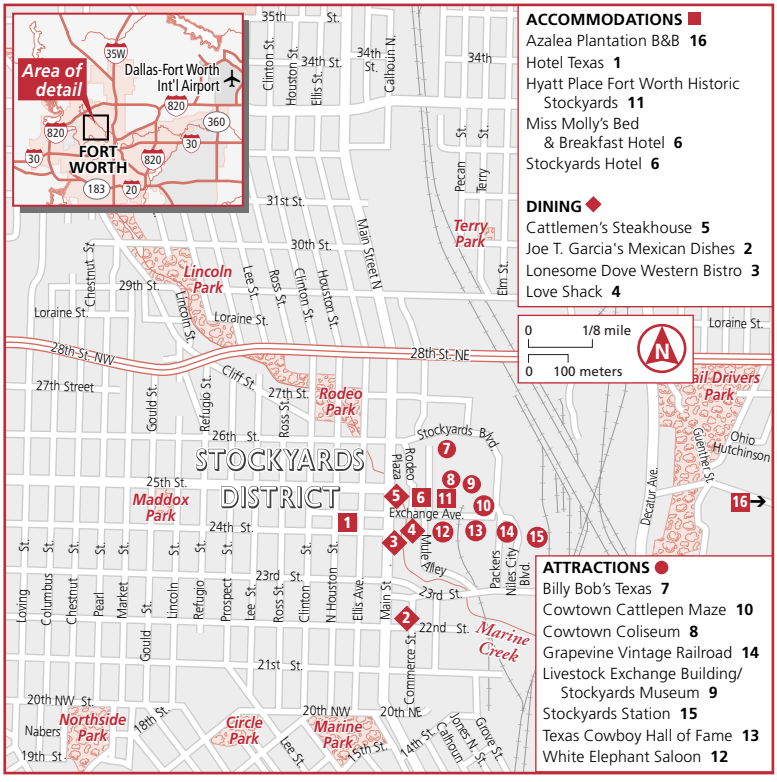
**Medical District** Immediately south of downtown, this is the site of major hospitals and several residential areas, and Fort Worth's major university, Texas Christian University (TCU). Many hotels and restaurants are located south of I-30 as well. There's no major benefit to basing yourself here, but it's where you'll find some of the cheaper hotel options.

## Getting Around

### By Public Transportation

For information on getting to Fort Worth from DFW Airport, see section 1, earlier in this chapter.

Within the city, the only public transportation most visitors will need are city buses (the T) that run every 20 minutes among the three major districts, from the Fort Worth Zoo all the way to the Stockyards, making stops downtown on the way. Buses run daily from 6:15am to 10:15pm. The regular one-way fare is $1.50 for adults; 75¢ for seniors, travelers with disabilities, and students ages 6 to 16; and $3 ($1.50 students and seniors) for a Day Pass. Within the downtown area, service is free. Route 1 (brown) travels from North Main Street to the Stockyards; Route 2 (blue), from Camp Bowie to the Cultural District; and Route 7 (green), from University/Montgomery to the Cultural District.




Trolley Route 15 travels Saturday only to the Stockyards from downtown hotels and the ITC rail station. A trolley also runs on Saturdays from the ITC rail station to the Fort Worth Zoo with stops in the Cultural District. Pick up a schedule at any visitor information center or obtain information on schedules by calling ✆ **817/215-8600** or 334-0092, or by visiting the website at www.the-t.com.

The **Trinity Railway Express (TRE)** is the most convenient and hassle-free way to travel to Dallas without having to worry about traffic. It's an express commuter train connecting the two cities, traveling to DFW Airport, Irving, Dallas's American Airlines Center (for Mavericks and Stars games), and Dallas Union Station ($5 round-trip). Pickup and drop-off points are the Texas & Pacific Station and the Intermodal Transportation Center downtown. Call ✆ **877/215-8600** or 817/215-8600 or visit www.the-t.com for route and schedule information.

## By Car

With the city's efficient bus and trolley services, you can quite easily manage to get around Fort Worth without a car. However, if you want to spend time in Dallas or Arlington, you will be better off with an automobile. Car-rental agencies in Fort Worth include **Avis,** 801 W. Weatherford (✆ 800/230-4898; www.avis.com); **Budget,** 1001

Henderson (✆ 800/527-0700; www.budget.com); **Enterprise,** 2832 W. 7th St. (✆ 800/RENT A CAR [736-8222]; www.enterprise.com); and **Hertz,** 917 Taylor St. (✆ 817/654-3131; www.hertz.com).

### By Taxi

You'll have to call a cab unless you're lucky enough to catch one outside a hotel. The major companies operating in Fort Worth are **Yellow Checker Taxi** (✆ **817/426-6262**) and **Cowboy Cab** (✆ **817/428-0202**). Fares are $2.25 (initial drop) and 20¢ for each additional 1/9 mile. Extras include $2 extra passenger charge, $3.60 airport exit fee, and $2.60 airport drop-off fee.

## WHERE TO STAY

Fort Worth may not be loaded with superdeluxe places with all the amenities, but it does have a nice mix of affordable hotels, including an attractive roster of Western-flavored small hotels and bed-and-breakfasts. Accommodations are spread fairly evenly among the major districts of interest, so you can stay on the main drag of the Stockyards, downtown on Sundance Square, or south of town near the Cultural District. Everything in Fort Worth is pretty close and easily accessible, though, so you needn't choose your hotel strictly according to your primary sightseeing interests. A new addition to Fort Worth's high-end hotel market, the high-rise, 614-room **Omni Fort Worth,** next to the Convention Center at 1300 Houston St. (✆ **817/535-6664;** fax 817/882-8140; www.omnihotels.com), opened in early 2009, with a full on-site spa.

At Stockyards District hotels, unlike in most places, weekend rates are higher than weekday rates. The rates quoted below do not include 15% hotel occupancy tax. Breakfast, either continental or buffet, is offered free at several hotels, as noted below. Do not assume that breakfast is included; if it is not, it can really add to your bill.

The rates cited below, it bears repeating, are high-season rack rates. At a minimum, request the lower corporate rate, and ask about special deals. Virtually all hotels offer some deals, especially on weekends when their business clientele dries up. This is not the case in the Stockyards, however, where prices rise on weekends. Check individual hotels' websites for special online offers.

### Stockyards National Historic District

#### Expensive

**Stockyards Hotel** ★★ A true taste of the Old West, the Stockyards Hotel has, since 1907, been the heart of Fort Worth's illustrious cowboy and railroad past (the original hotel was destroyed by fire in 1915). Bonnie and Clyde hid out here, Wild West poker games and gunslinging fights went down here, and country music stars have come to perform at nearby Billy Bob's. Behind the historic brick facade, each of the rooms works a different aspect of an Old West theme. You can stay in the Davy Crockett, Geronimo, or Victorian Parlor room, or sleep where Bonnie and Clyde did in the early '30s (that's cool enough to make it my favorite). The Stockyards Hotel gets the look and feel right: It's not a stretch to imagine cowboys riding up in a cloud of dust and tying their horses up to the posts out front, making it the ideal place to stay in Fort Worth for a real Western experience. The connected restaurant is the H3 Ranch Steakhouse, just a notch below the Cattlemen's Steakhouse (p. 134) around the corner, but a good place for wood-fired steaks, ribs, and spit-roasted pork and chicken. The bar, with horse-saddle bar stools, is called Booger Red's Saloon (where you can knock back a cold Buffalo Butt beer).

**ATTRACTIONS** ●

Bass Performance Hall **6**
Fire Station No. 1/150 Years of Fort Worth Exhibit **1**
Fort Worth Water Gardens **12**
Sid Richardson Museum **4**

**ACCOMMODATIONS** ■

The Ashton Hotel **8**
Etta's Place **7**
Hilton Fort Worth **10**
Omni Fort Worth **11**
The Worthington, A Renaissance Hotel **2**

**DINING** ◆

610 Grille **8**
Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House **9**
Ferré Ristorante e Bar **5**
Reata **3**

## Fast Facts Fort Worth

***American Express*** There is an office at Gulliver's Travel, 2800 S. Hulen, #110 (✆ **817/924-7766;** Mon–Fri 9am–5pm).

***Babysitters*** If your hotel doesn't offer babysitting services, contact **Baby Sitters of Dallas** (✆ **817/960-2174;** www.babysittersofdallas.com) for child care; despite the name, they handle Fort Worth and Tarrant County.

***Dentists*** Call ✆ **800/577-7320** for a dentist referral service.

***Doctors*** Call the **Tarrant County Medical Society** (✆ **817/732-3997**) for a doctor referral.

***Drugstores*** Area locations for **Eckerd Drugs** include 3208 N. Main St., near the Stockyards (✆ **817/625-6179**), and 611 Houston St. at Sundance Square (✆ **817/336-7105**). The Eckerd store at 6389 Camp Bowie Blvd. in the Cultural District (✆ **817/737-3125**) is open 24 hours.

***Hospitals*** The Medical District, south of downtown, has two large, full-service hospitals: **Columbia Plaza Medical Center,** 900 8th Ave. (✆ **817/336-2100**), and **Baylor All Saints Medical Center,** 1400 8th Ave. (✆ **817/926-2544**).

***Internet Access*** One centrally located cybercafe is **Cyber Rodeo,** 1309 Calhoun St., within the Rodeo Steakhouse (✆ **817/332-1288**). Free wireless hot spots include **8.0 Restaurant and Bar,** 111 E. 3rd St. (✆ **817/336-0880**), and **Flying Saucer Drought Emporium,** 111 E. 4th St. (✆ **817/336-7468**).

***Maps*** Any of the Fort Worth tourist information centers can provide you with free maps of all of Fort Worth or of individual districts.

***Newspapers & Magazines*** Both the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and the *Dallas Morning News* "Weekend Guide" have plenty of arts, entertainment, and dining information for Fort Worth and the Metroplex.

***Police*** For an emergency, dial ✆ **911.** For nonemergencies, call ✆ **817/871-6458.** The main police station in downtown Fort Worth is located at 350 W. Belknap (at Taylor).

***Post Office*** The main downtown post office, 251 W. Lancaster (✆ **817/348-0565**), is open Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 7pm.

***Safety*** For a city of more than 600,000 (and the 17th-largest city in the country), Fort Worth is a relaxed and, from most appearances, safe city. Still, as in any large city, visitors should exercise caution and keep an eye on their handbags, especially at night, in major tourist destinations such as the Stockyards and the Cultural District, and downtown around Sundance Square. Beyond Sundance Square, which is very lively at night, much of downtown Fort Worth is virtually deserted after 9pm. Drive or take a taxi late at night.

***Taxes*** The general sales tax is 8.25%, hotel tax is 15%, and restaurant tax is 7%.

***Transit Info*** For general public transportation questions, call the **Fort Worth Transportation Authority** at ✆ **817/871-6200.** For "the T" bus schedule information, call ✆ **817/215-8600** or 334-0092 or visit www.the-t.com.

***Weather*** For the latest weather information, call ✆ **817/787-1111.**

109 W. Exchange Ave., Fort Worth, TX 76106. ✆ **800/423-8471** or 817/625-6427. Fax 817/624-2571. www.stockyardshotel.com. 52 units. $189–$269 double; $225–$425 suite. Weekend and other packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $10. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

## Moderate

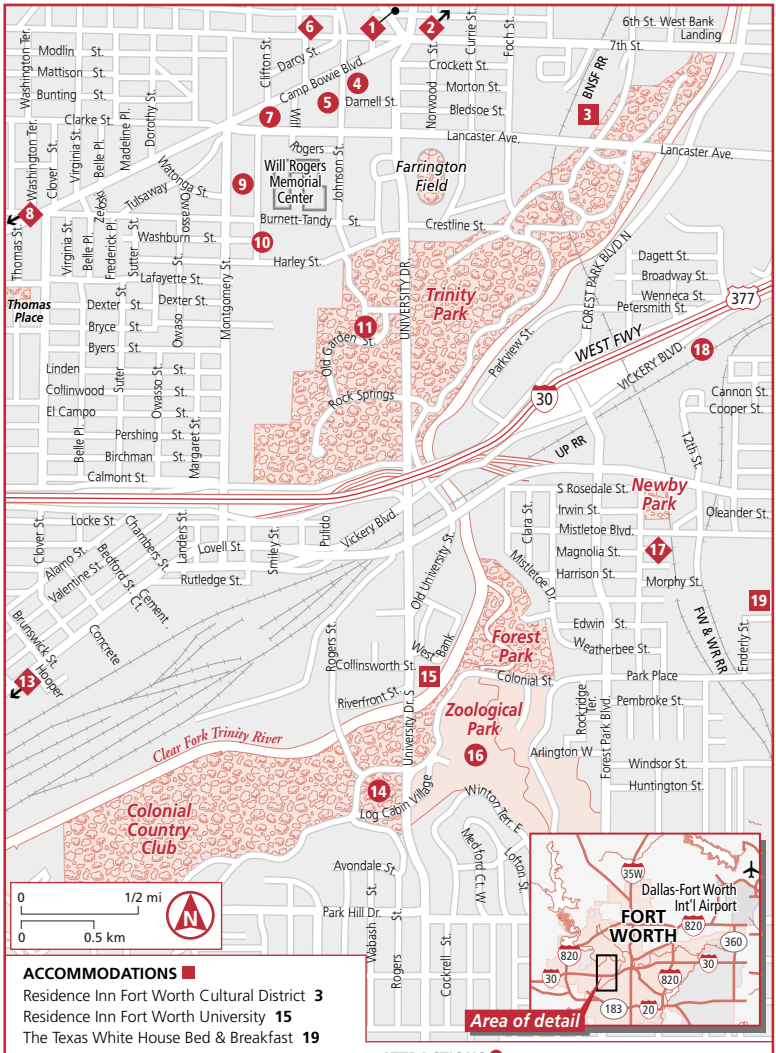
**Azalea Plantation B&B** (Value) Near the Stockyards, but secluded on a couple of acres of oaks, magnolias, and azaleas, this 1948 plantation-style home is a peaceful place that invites relaxation: It has a gazebo and wooden yard swing, a fireplace in the parlor, crystal and china, and a Victorian dining room. There are two upstairs rooms and two cottages, all with comfortable beds. The Lily of the Valley Room has a whirlpool tub, king-size poster-bed, and veranda; the Bluebonnet Bungalow is a cottage with a cowtown theme; and the Rose of Sharon room has a king-size canopy bed and marble-floored bathroom, and opens onto a veranda. The Magnolia cottage features a private parlor and giant Jacuzzi. Some guests might find the furnishings and decor to be a bit frilly for their tastes, though others will eat it up. Early-morning coffee and a "hearty plantation" breakfast will start you out on the right foot.

1400 Robinwood Dr., Fort Worth, TX 76111. ✆ **800/687-3529** or 817/838-5882. www.azaleaplantation.com. 4 units. $189 double; $209 cottage suite. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* A/C, TV, CD player, Wi-Fi, complimentary minibar.

**Hyatt Place Fort Worth Historic Stockyards** ★ (Value) (Kids) Although it looks a bit out of place in this historic district, this revamped hotel is a welcome addition to this part of Cowtown. Thankfully, it's set back from the main drag, so its rather generic large facade doesn't disparage too greatly the look of the old cobblestone street that's lined with former stables and historic buildings. Its excellent location and good-value accommodations, which are clean and modern, if unexciting, are what recommend this hotel (prices below are from when it was still an AmeriSuites; they may rise after the sale is completed). It's not as Fort Worth cool as the Stockyards Hotel up the street, but if you get a nice low rate here, it will be worth it, especially if you've got kids in tow—they'll appreciate the pool and the location across the street from the Cattle Pen maze.

132 E. Exchange Ave., Fort Worth, TX 76106. ✆ **817/626-6000.** Fax 817/626-6018. http://stockyards.place.hyatt.com. 102 units. $139–$219 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; fitness center; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, microwave, hair dryer, safe.

**Miss Molly's Bed & Breakfast Hotel** (Overrated) Above a raucous bar, Miss Molly's is a slightly bawdy little place (it was a former bordello, after all, and is rumored to be haunted) that's seen all manner of folks come through: cattle barons, outlaws, railroaders, and cowboys. Today, it's much more likely to host couples looking to indulge in a little Old West romanticism and partying in the Stockyards. The landmark 1910 Victorian building, a second story wedged in among the saloons and Western shops on the main drag of the Stockyards, is decorated with Western quilts, handsome period pieces, and Victorian lamps. The seven rooms are arranged around the lobby/living room, at the top of a staircase. Rooms are named for their decorative theme; for example, the Cattlemen's room has a carved oak bed beneath mounted longhorns, and Miss Amelia's has lace curtains, a white iron bed, and handmade linens. Miss Josie's, the Victorian bedroom of the former madam and the closest thing to a den of iniquity, is twice as large as the other rooms. Be forewarned, though, that guests share three bathrooms (albeit with claw-foot tubs), and the Star Café saloon downstairs and other nearby bars and clubs can be very




**ACCOMMODATIONS** ■
Residence Inn Fort Worth Cultural District **3**
Residence Inn Fort Worth University **15**
The Texas White House Bed & Breakfast **19**

**DINING** ◆
Angelo's **2**
Brix Pizza & Wine Bar **13**
Café Modern **4**
Kinkaid's Grocery Market **8**
Lanny's Alta Cocina Mexicana **6**
Paris Coffee Shop **17**
Railhead Smokehouse **12**
Sardines Ristorante Italiano **1**

**ATTRACTIONS** ●
Amon Carter Museum of Western Art **7**
Fort Worth Botanic & Japanese Gardens **11**
Fort Worth Museum of Science and History **9**
Fort Worth Zoo **16**
Kimbell Art Museum **5**
Log Cabin Village **14**
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth **4**
National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame **10**
Thistle Hill House Museum **18**

noisy, often until 3am on weekends. But worst of all, some travelers report that off-site management has let the place get run down, is apt not to provide the breakfast in "bed-and-breakfast," and isn't terribly responsive to entreaties.

109½ W. Exchange Ave., Fort Worth, TX 76106. ✆ **817/626-1522.** Fax 817/625-2723. www.missmollyshotel.com. 7 units. $100–$175 double. AE, MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* A/C.

### Inexpensive

**Hotel Texas** A very simple, even spartan, cowboy-themed small hotel on the main drag of the Stockyards, this 1939 hotel has a convenient location and is easy on the wallet. Don't expect much in the way of service or amenities, however; it's strictly for those on a budget. The former Exchange Hotel, reopened in 1995, retains the airs of a place where cattlemen might have stayed when venturing into the big city for auction. The 21 rooms, including a couple of spacious suites, are modest, though the Honeymoon Room has a Jacuzzi and the second-story, family-size but very pricey Bob Wills Suite comprises four separate guest rooms and has good views of the Stockyards. Within easy walking distance of the major attractions, restaurants, and nightlife in the Stockyards district, Hotel Texas is a serviceable place to camp out in Cowtown, as long as your expectations aren't too high. Though I'm usually one to champion a small independent hotel over a chain, it's probably worth comparing prices at the larger and more dependable Hyatt Place down the street.

2415 Ellis Ave. (at W. Exchange Ave.), Fort Worth, TX 76106. ✆ **800/866-6660** or 817/624-2224. Fax 817/624-7177. www.hoteltexasdfw.com. 21 units. Fri–Sat $79–$149 double, $149 honeymoon suite, $400 suite; Sun–Thurs $49–$99 double, $300 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking Thurs–Sat (other days free street parking available). *In room:* A/C, TV.

## Downtown

### Expensive

**The Ashton Hotel** ★★ Incorporating meticulously restored historic buildings on Main Street, the 1890 Winfree Building and the 1915 Fort Worth Club Building, the city's only small luxury hotel—a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World—fills a niche in Fort Worth. Just a few slow paces from Bass Performance Hall and Sundance Square, it features richly appointed, elegant rooms with custom-designed mahogany furnishings, invitingly plush king-size beds and Italian linens, and very attentive service. Some rooms have romantic two-person claw-foot Jacuzzi tubs. The hotel is decorated with a collection of paintings from the Fort Worth Circle, a group of local artists active from the 1930s to the 1960s. The elegant restaurant, 610 Grille, one of the more notable new eateries to open in the Dallas–Fort Worth area in recent years, serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as an elegant afternoon tea (p. 137).

610 Main St. (btw. 5th and 6th sts.), Fort Worth, TX 76102. ✆ **866/327-4866** or 817/332-0100. Fax 817/332-0110. www.theashtonhotel.com. 39 units. $199–$369 double. Weekend, executive, and special promotional packages available; see website. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $12; self-parking $8 per day. Small pets welcome. **Amenities:** Restaurant; piano bar; gym; concierge; 24-hr. room service; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

**The Worthington, A Renaissance Hotel** ★ Downtown's largest and swankiest hotel, the monolithic but newly renovated Worthington is the place where modern-day cattle barons—oilmen and other execs—like to cool their heels in Fort Worth. A block from the courthouse and only steps away from Bass Performance Hall and the array of restaurants and bars clustered around Sundance Square, the hotel dominates one part of downtown like a huge, docked cruise ship. The large and elegant, surprisingly understated lobby is a hint of the spacious rooms, which are warm, sedate, and handsomely

appointed, with very comfortable beds, large writing desks, colorful accents, and large bathrooms. The Kalamatas Restaurant and Martini Bar serves Mediterranean cuisine and is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

200 Main St., Fort Worth, TX 76102. ✆ **817/870-1000.** Fax 817/338-9176. www.marriott.com. 504 units. $259–$289 double; $359–$1,000 suite. Moonlight and weekend packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $19; self-parking $13 per day. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; indoor pool; tennis courts; fitness center; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Moderate

**Etta's Place** ★ (Value) In the heart of historic downtown, Etta's is much more a cozy boutique hotel than a mom-and-pop B&B. Occupying the second floor of a landmark building, which once housed Fort Worth's venerable jazz club, Caravan of Dreams, on Sundance Square, the inn is within easy walking distance of downtown shops and restaurants, and just a short drive or trolley ride from the Cultural District and Stockyards. Named for Etta Place, the girlfriend of the Sundance Kid (said to be the most comely of Wild West women), the inn has spacious rooms with lots of light and well-chosen Texas touches, including antique chairs, horseshoe lamps, and Americana quilts. The handsome library and music rooms, with clubby leather chairs, are great places to relax with a book or chat with other guests. There are six good-size rooms, three roomy luxury suites with king-size beds and kitchenettes, and Etta's Attic, a penthouse suite with a kitchenette. A full home-cooked breakfast is included.

200 W. 3rd St., Fort Worth, TX 76102. ✆ **866/355-5760** or 817/255-5760. Fax 817/878-2560. www.ettas-place.com. 11 units. $150–$185 double; $185–$240 suite. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; game room; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, kitchenette in suites.

**Hilton Fort Worth** ★ (Value) This large, historic, and centrally located hotel—opened in 1921 as the Texas Hotel and where JFK spent the night before and was memorably photographed on the morning of his assassination in Dallas—was recently renovated and incorporated into the Hilton family. The badly needed, $9-million makeover, which jettisoned an adjacent annex, has transformed this hotel from a dowdy also-ran to one of the top large hotels in downtown Fort Worth. Behind a beautiful old brick facade is a soaring, impressive lobby; guest rooms are now swank and serene, with handsome (even masculine) color schemes, elegant furnishings, and plush bedding. Bathrooms have also been overhauled. Though the hotel has long been popular with groups, conventioneers, and other visiting businesspeople, it is now a superb place to stay for virtually anyone visiting Fort Worth (children stay free when occupying their parent's room), and it's a good value for this level of sophistication, style, and convenience to Sundance Square's lively restaurants and bars. Look for a new restaurant soon to complement the casual Texas Café.

815 Main St., Fort Worth, TX 76102. ✆ **800/HILTONS** (445-8667) or 817/870-2100. Fax 817/335-3408. www.hilton.com. 294 units. $149–$229 double. Weekend rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $17. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; fitness center; spa; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## Cultural District

### Moderate

**Residence Inn Fort Worth Cultural District** (Value) (Kids) An extended-stay hotel at the edge of the Cultural District (perfectly convenient as well to downtown, which is

### Tips Hotel Chains in a Pinch

If you can't get a room in any of the suites hotels reviewed in this section, four additional, good-value chain hotels especially worth looking into in Fort Worth are **La Quinta Inn,** 4900 Bryant Irvin Rd. (✆ **800/531-5900;** www.lq.com), which has attractive two-room suites with kitchenettes, a pool, and a gazebo; **Courtyard by Marriott/University,** 3150 Riverfront Dr. (✆ **817/335-1300;** http://marriott.com/property/propertypage/dfwms); the recently renovated **Courtyard by Marriott Downtown/Blackstone,** 601 Main St. (✆ **817/885-8700;** http://marriott.com/property/propertypage/dfwch); and, near the Stockyards, **Country Inn & Suites by Carlson,** 2200 Mercado Dr. (✆ **817/831-9200;** www.countryinns.com/fortworthtx).

less than a mile away), this large and very comfortable hotel is great for families and anyone staying a while in Fort Worth. With an elegant stone exterior, a large outdoor pool, and nicely decorated rooms, it's a big step up from the standard Residence Inn. The spacious rooms, which include studios, one-bedroom suites, and two-bedroom suites, are essentially apartments, with full kitchens and large bathrooms. They're larger than just about any hotel room in town (save big-bucks presidential suites). Most have additional foldout sleeping couches and can easily accommodate a family of four.

2500 Museum Way, Fort Worth, TX 76107. ✆ **800/331-3131** or 817/885-8250. Fax 817/885-8252. www.marriott.com/residence-inn/travel.mi. 150 units. $149–$229 double; $249–$259 suite. Rates include full breakfast buffet and daily cocktail hour. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; fitness center and paddle ball court; Jacuzzi; laundry facilities/same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen, hair dryer.

**The Texas White House Bed & Breakfast** ★ Value A big, handsome, and, yes, white house with a wraparound porch and backyard with gazebo, this elegant, immaculate country home is a fine place to kick up your boots. In the Medical District, near All Saints Episcopal Hospital, the house has hardwood floors, a spacious parlor, a living room with fireplace, a formal dining room, and well-maintained, warm accommodations with plush beds. There's no Lincoln Bedroom, but the Lone Star Room has nice antiques like a triple armoire, and a parson's bench sitting area and claw-foot tub. The Land of Contrast Room is done in black and white and has a large bathroom and queen-size brass bed; it may be a little frilly for some cowboys. And the Tejas Room has light oak furniture, his-and-hers rocking chairs, and a large platform tub. The Mustang and Longhorn suites have special amenities such as a balcony porch and fireplace (the Mustang even has a two-person, in-room sauna). The friendly owners serve a full gourmet breakfast and are happy to dispense all sorts of dining and activities recommendations.

1417 8th Ave., Fort Worth, TX 76104. ✆ **800/279-6491** or 817/923-3597. Fax 817/923-0410. www.texaswhitehouse.com. 5 units. $145 double; $235 suite. Rates include full breakfast. Reduced rates for more than 1-night stays; special packages for honeymoons and anniversaries. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

## Inexpensive

**Residence Inn Fort Worth University** Value Kids A former apartment complex, Residence Inn still feels much more like a residence than a chain motel. The spacious

layouts, on two floors, have fully equipped kitchens and sitting areas. Most suites even have fireplaces. The penthouse suites are lofts. Many visitors are relocating businesspeople and families, and the inn does its best to foster a community; every evening there's a happy hour with free beer and wine and enough snacks to amount to a light evening meal. This place is great for families, as it's within walking distance of the Fort Worth Zoo and near the Cultural District.

1701 S. University Dr., Fort Worth, TX 76107. ✆ **800/331-3131** or 817/870-1011. Fax 817/732-2114. www.marriott.com. 120 units. $119–$159 double; $179–$199 suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; fitness center privileges; Jacuzzi; limited room service; laundry facilities/same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette.

## WHERE TO DINE

Fort Worth's dining scene may not be as lauded or as flashy as the one in Dallas, but it is increasingly sophisticated, with excellent steakhouses, innovative Southwestern and haute Mexican cuisine alongside family-oriented Tex-Mex and barbecue joints. Although very few hotels are prime dining spots (outside of 610 Grille at the Ashton Hotel), one of the city's vaunted art museums, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (p. 146), has a terrific fine-dining restaurant for lunch and Sunday brunch, **Café Modern** ★★ (✆ **817/840-2157**), overlooking the reflective pool (the restaurant was named one of the best in the U.S. by *Gourmet* magazine).

### Stockyards National Historic District

#### Expensive

**Cattlemen's Steakhouse** ★ (Kids) STEAK Cattlemen's has been serving the good people of Fort Worth for 60 years now. It's a relaxed (if frequently boisterous), affordable, and nicely worn place for a thick steak in the heart of cattle country, just around the corner from the Stockyards' main drag. It's great for families: There are separate rooms, like pens, and the server will bring place mats with barnyard animal stickers, a good kiddie menu, and a lollipop at the end of the meal. The thick, juicy, charcoal-broiled cuts of beef include a 13-ounce Kansas City sirloin, three cuts of rib-eye, a 16-ounce Texas T-bone, and a pretty good and juicy version of chicken-fried steak. The service is friendly and low-key, and the crowd is a mix of families and, as my young nephew once observed, "lotsa men drinkin' wine and tellin' jokes." Those are the same guys who know that Cattlemen's is a good place to bust your aorta without breaking the bank.

2458 N. Main St. ✆ **817/624-3945.** www.cattlemenssteakhouse.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$18 lunch, $21–$44 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 1–9pm.

**Lonesome Dove Western Bistro** ★★★ GOURMET WESTERN A wildly successful little restaurant, this cozy venture riding a wave of cowboy cool is decorated in the style of an old saloon, with a long bar, high-backed Mexican iron bar stools, copper-toned tin ceiling, bold paintings with Western themes, and a kitchen staff donning cowboy hats. The eclectic menu is a bit of a shock, though a thoroughly welcome one, in the Old West neighborhood of the Stockyards. Appetizers include chile-rubbed foie gras brûlée (on Texas toast) and seared sweet lobster cakes with corn/black-bean salsa and cilantro-orange butter sauce. The offbeat main courses opt for unique touches, such as the pancetta-wrapped Texas red fish or the grilled New Zealand deer chops with truffled mac and cheese and morels. Straight-up meat eaters will delight in the hand-cut prime steaks, priced by the ounce. For lunch, check out the fresh buffalo burger or quail quesadillas; the daily $9 "Stockyard Special" is always a great deal. Although Chef Tim

Love, an *Iron Chef* winner, was not able to ride his celebrity to success in the hostile restaurant terrain of New York City (where an outpost of Lonesome Dove went under), he's doing just fine back home.

2406 N. Main St. ✆ **817/740-8810.** www.lonesomedovebistro.com. Reservations required. Main courses lunch $9–$35, dinner $19–$35. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11am–2:30pm; Sun–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm.

### Inexpensive

**Joe T. Garcia's Mexican Dishes** Value Kids TEX-MEX At this enduringly popular Cowtown Tex-Mex institution (opened in 1935) just south of the Stockyards, almost everyone already knows that they don't have menus, do only two dinner dishes, and take only cash (or check). That's because they've been here many times before and will be back again and again. This restaurant, in a rambling home that looks like a pretty Mexican hacienda, has a lush outdoor patio sitting area (incredibly, large enough to seat 1,000 hungry eaters, though it never feels massified) set around a pool. Indoors is comfortably relaxed, but outdoors is the place to be—unless the Texas heat is suffocating. Ordering couldn't be simpler: Choose between a heaping plate of succulently grilled chicken or beef fajitas, a big family-style dinner with tacos and enchiladas, or chiles rellenos, tamales, and chicken flautas at lunch. Joe T.'s is a margarita factory, spitting out thousands of them—on the rocks and frozen (pitchers are a good deal at $15). Service can be a little erratic, though it's frequently lightning fast. A Mexican-style brunch is served on Saturdays and Sundays from 11am to 2pm.

2201 N. Commerce St. ✆ **817/626-4356.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $9.25–$15. No credit cards. Mon–Thurs 11am–2:30pm and 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 11am–10pm.

**Love Shack** ★ Value Kids GOURMET BURGERS Around the corner from his wildly successful Lonesome Dove restaurant, Chef Tim Love has created the ultimate burger shack. Basically a counter-cum-kiosk (with mostly outdoor seating) dispensing delicious burgers on store-bought buns and cardboard trays, with nothing on the menu more than eight bucks, it's the kind of place you wish there was after a night at Billy Bob's, or when the kids are cranky. The burgers are a mix of prime tenderloin and prime brisket; if you're feeling indulgent, go for the Dirty Love burger, which piles on bacon curls, fried quail egg, and "love sauce." There are hot dogs, too; the standout is the Flying Texas Dog, a chicken-apple bratwurst combo with green chiles and onions. And the Crazy Good Onion Rings speak for themselves. To top things off, there's beer and wine, fresh lemonade, root beer on tap, milkshakes (a different one each day), and live country music here as well as next door at the White Saloon (now also part of Chef Love's burgeoning honky-tonk empire).

110 E. Exchange Ave. ✆ **817/740-8812.** www.shakeyourloveshack.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $2.30–$7.40. No credit cards. Sun–Tues 11am–9pm; Wed–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–1am.

## Downtown

### Expensive

**Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House** ★★ STEAK Fort Worth's top steakhouse is a clubby two-level place for cattle barons, power brokers, jet-setters, and meat lovers. In a redbrick corner building (ca. 1890s), huge top-notch steaks are the story. The filet mignon (in 8- and 12-oz. versions) is butter-soft; other cuts of prime beef include a marbled rib-eye, prime porterhouse, and Santa Fe peppercorn steak. Pinstripe and new economy types will love the cigar lounge, which has a nice selection of

## Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants in Fort Worth

**Cattlemen's Steakhouse** (p. 134) No slick banker's steakhouse, this homey, well-worn place in the heart of the Stockyards has several separate rooms, and kids get place mats adorned with barnyard animal stickers, a kiddie menu, and a lollipop treat. And parents get what they come for: a good-value steak.

**Ferré Ristorante e Bar** (see below) Kids love the views of the Bass Hall angels. Parents love the attractive and spacious dining area and the good Tuscan fare.

**Joe T. Garcia's Mexican Dishes** (p. 135) No menus? No problem. This Tex-Mex institution serves up two dishes daily, so you can spend less time deciding what to order and more time sipping margaritas. Parents and kids will both enjoy the delightful outdoor patio.

**Kinkaid's Grocery Market** (p. 139) Burger heaven in Fort Worth is an old-time 1940s grocery store that makes some of the best burgers in Texas. Kids are sure to be entertained by the protocol: You place your order at the open kitchen in back, get a white paper bag with your name scrawled on it, pay at the register, and then pick out a spot at a communal table beneath a jungle of inflatable toys hanging from the ceiling.

**Love Shack** (p. 135) Gourmet burgers (and dogs, fries, and rings) by a celebrity chef, but the price is right, the meat is fresh-ground daily, there are different special milkshakes each day, and there's outdoor seating, all just a stone's throw from the daily cattle herd run in the Stockyards.

**Railhead Smokehouse** (p. 139) A Fort Worth barbecue fave that draws families every night of the week for its tasty barbecue and relaxed atmosphere. The place is noisy without rising to the levels of a Chuck E. Cheese's, and excellent-value children's plates will keep the kids happy.

**Sardines Ristorante Italiano** (p. 138) The good vibes and generous helpings keep folks coming back. The pasta dishes, inexpensive wines, and nightly jazz make this a destination for the whole family.

Robustos, and the deep wine cellar. Desserts, if you make it to them, are every bit as artery-clogging and overwhelming as the main courses. For some Fort Worth natives, though, this bit of Big D swagger and priceyness is a bit much for their laid-back downtown. Cattlemen's Steakhouse is a little more low-key, though a step down in quality for beef lovers.

812 Main St. at 8th St. ✆ **817/877-3999.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$40. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm.

**Ferré Ristorante e Bar** ★ TUSCAN Occupying the coveted spot across the street from Bass Hall, where the one-time stalwart Angeluna used to be, this popular, upscale Italian restaurant caters to concertgoers as well as local business folk and couples heading to Sundance Square on date night. It's a smart-looking, spacious restaurant that's not

overwhelming in size, with lots of windows that show off the huge angels of Bass Hall's illuminated facade. The menu doesn't aim for overly adventurous or showy, though it does offer dependable Italian and Tuscan standards, including homemade pastas, such as sweet-potato gnocchi and orechietti with homemade fennel sausage, and gourmet pizzas. Among main courses, I especially liked the Chilean sea bass with spinach-crimini risotto and clove-roasted pork loin.

215 E. 4th St. ✆ **817/332-0033.** Reservations required. Main courses $13–$36. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3:30pm; Sat noon–4pm; Sun–Thurs 4–10pm; Fri–Sat 4–11pm.

**Reata ★★** SOUTHWESTERN Still proudly spearheading the Southwestern cuisine movement, which may have run its course elsewhere but is perfectly at home in Cowtown, Reata moved to its current location after the great Fort Worth tornado of 2000 condemned its former home, the Bank One tower. Named for the ranch in the movie *Giant,* Reata, in the space formerly inhabited by Fort Worth's once loved and sadly gone-jazz club, Caravan of Dreams, sports a great rooftop Grotto Bar and dining area inside the glass dome on the roof. The restaurant has basic fare, such as chicken-fried steak, chicken chiles rellenos, and marbled rib-eye, as well as more creative interpretations, such as carne asada with cacciota cheese enchiladas, which are consistently well prepared enough to keep more adventurous diners interested. Portions are still huge, and some dishes suffer from cheese, cream, and sauce overkill. Sunday brunch is a tried-and-true local favorite. The waitstaff are appropriately outfitted in jeans and cowboy vests; they efficiently herd the crowds of casual and big-night-out diners through this mainstay of Texas urban chic.

310 Houston St. ✆ **817/336-1009.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $16–$42. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 5–10:30pm.

**610 Grille ★★** NEW AMERICAN Fort Worth natives aren't usually too impressed by anything too slick or haute, but this fine addition to the dining scene, in the elegant Ashton Hotel (p. 131), has changed the way diners think about this cow town. The New American menu, with Asian and Latin accents, at 610 Grille, a sleek restaurant quietly decorated in soothing colors, is stellar. Dine on such creative dishes as beef stroganoff with morels in brandy-laced cream sauce or Chilean sea bass with a fresh crab and potato purée, tomato, and mandarin-orange chutney. The deceptively simple-looking roasted harissa chicken, served on a bed of Swiss chard and with a base of black-truffle potato rosti, is scrumptious. For an appetizer, the seared diver scallops and warm shrimp beignets, served on greens with mango salsa and crème fraîche, are not to be missed. The small but select wine list is, refreshingly, reasonably priced. Even if you're not staying at this fine hotel, make an effort to eat here, even if it's only for a rewarding breakfast.

610 Main St. ✆ **817/332-0100.** Reservations required. Main courses $15–$34. AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10am and 11am–2pm; Sun–Thurs 5–9pm; Fri–Sat 5–10pm.

## Cultural District

### Very Expensive

**Lanny's Alta Cocina Mexicana ★★★** NOUVEAU MEXICAN You'd never know by dining at this upscale, refined, small restaurant that the chef and owner is the great-grandson of the gentleman who opened the Stockyards' Joe T. Garcia's, a legendary slinger of crowd-pleasing fajitas, enchiladas, and margaritas. Lanny Lancarte takes an entirely different approach to Mexican dining, infusing it with Mediterranean flair (or perhaps it's the other way around, Mediterranean fare with Mexican accents). Whatever

it is, it is stylishly pr esented, elegant, and delicious. I t's also pricey. These are New York tariffs and then some, but if you're willing to foot the bill, you can be assured of a creative meal, tantalizing new tastes, and a superb international wine list. K obe beef ceviche and tapas such as *mole*-**braised pork tamales get one's taste buds in gear for prime car ne asada with macaroni gratin or black sea bass in a poblano and asparagus sauce. The** small house is warmly contemporar y, with chocolate-br own leather chairs, terra-cotta–colored curtains, and modern track lighting. The five-course tasting menu ($60) is the best way to get a handle on Lancarte's cooking, and also a relatively good deal (with wine pairing, $100). The name Lanny's may sound casual, but the r est of it means "M exican haute cuisine," a perfect description of its high aims.

3405 W. 7th St. ✆ **817/850-9996.** w ww.lannyskitchen.com. Reser vations required. Main courses $28–$46. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Tues–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm.

## Moderate

**Brix Pizza & Wine Bar** ★ Value PIZZA/ITALIAN New York pizza has come to Fort Worth courtesy of an I talian, Daniele Puleo (owner of D aniele O steria in D allas). This amiable and unpr etentious pizz eria ser ves tasty and r easonably priced wood-fir ed pies, panini, and fr esh salads in a modern, r elaxed setting. The B rooklyn pizza spor ts meatballs; the Salsiccia features Sicilian sausage, mozzarella, bell peppers, and dry ricotta cheese; and the H ell's Kitchen fries come with G orgonzola and Tabasco. Adapting East Coast standards to Co wtown, Puleo even does a F ort Worth cheesesteak. The wine list has a nice selection of American and Italian wines, including a couple of blowout bottles to dress up those pies.

2747 S. Hulen St. (at W. Vickery Blv d.). ✆ **817/924-2749.** w ww.brixpizzeria.com. Reser vations recommended. Main courses $11–$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

**Sardines R istorante I taliano** Value Kids ITALIAN After a pr otracted, heated battle, this F ort Worth landmark, which had seemingly for ever welcomed locals fr om a spot just acr oss fr om the museums, finally succumbed to the big bad dev elopment monster (the old digs w ere flattened and transformed into a par king lot). The popular, quirky I talian r estaurant mo ved to West F ort Worth and, amazingly , succeeded in transplanting its unique look and ambience—a cr oss between a smoky jazz div e and a neighborhood Italian joint in B rooklyn—to the new spot. All the antique pieces, metal signs, and photographs hav e been r elocated, and the dar k and intimate feel has been closely replicated. Sardines is per fect for dependable, gener ous helpings of I talian grub, inexpensive wine, and an abundance of good vibes and good nightly jazz star ing at 7pm. Some veal dishes can be mediocre; your best bet is to stick to the list of good pastas such as *linguine alla r osa* (with ar tichokes, capers, and oliv e oil) and seafood. The w eekday lunch specials ($6.95) ar e bargain-basement, and ther e's a popular happy hour M onday through Friday from 2 to 5pm.

509 N. Univ ersity Dr. (at Rock wood Park Dr. N). ✆ **817/332-9937.** w ww.sardinesftworth.com. Reser vations r ecommended. M ain c ourses $11–$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. M on–Thurs 11am–11:30pm; F ri 11am–12:30am; Sat 5pm–12:30am.

## Inexpensive

**Angelo's** ★ Value Finds BARBECUE Fort Worth's classic Texas barbecue joint, in this spot since 1958, is the r eal deal, a Co wtown legend. A fe w blocks nor th of the Cultural D istrict and w est of do wntown, it looks kind of like a large Texas J aycees convention hall, with wood paneling, mounted deer and buffalo heads, metal ceiling fans, and Formica tables. It's nearly as full of flavor as the hickory-smoked barbecue. The

sliced beef sandwich and beef brisket plates are the standard, though you can also detour toward salami, ham, turkey, and Polish sausage. The side dishes, such as coleslaw, pinto beans, and potato salad, are all excellent. Chicken and pork ribs are served all day "while they last," though hickory-smoked beef ribs don't make an appearance until after 3:30pm. Cold Bud comes in frosted steins. This place is so low-key that there's not even "waitress service" until 3pm.

2533 White Settlement Rd. ✆ **817/332-0357.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $4–$13. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm.

**Kinkaid's Grocery Market** (Value) (Kids) BURGERS As down-home and folksy as could be, Kinkaid's, a 1940s grocery store that one day started making burgers, is now a beloved institution in Fort Worth and the perennial winner of "Best Burger in Texas" polls. The standard order is a thick, juicy burger and fries or onion rings. There are a few other items, such as grilled chicken, hot dogs, and grilled-cheese sandwiches, but few people move beyond the time-tested basics. The large space, with pistachio-ice-cream-colored green cinder block walls, has a few communal picnic tables in front, long rows of stand-up counters, and an open kitchen in back. Place your order at the kitchen, pick up a white paper bag with your name scrawled on it, pay at the register, and find a spot under the inflatable toys hanging from the ceiling.

4901 Camp Bowie Blvd. (at Eldridge). ✆ **817/732-2881.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $3.50–$8. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11am–6pm.

**Paris Coffee Shop** (Value) (Finds) DINER/BREAKFAST AND LUNCH Around since the Great Depression, this big, wood-paneled dining room heaving with hungry Texans for breakfast and lunch is a longtime down-home favorite. There's not an ounce of Paris in it save the name. (Or maybe it's referring to Paris, Texas.) Service is classic Southern hospitality. Breakfast is the star: Choose from awesome pancakes, omelets, grits, and biscuits and gravy (on weekdays you can get "red-eye gravy," made with coffee, cinnamon, and bacon grease). Lunch is such standard fare as sandwiches, plate lunches (with a choice of meats and vegetables for $7), and chili, though there are lunch specials such as enchiladas and ham steak—and that famous red-eye gravy. Try the pies; in a place like this, you know they're good.

700 W. Magnolia Ave. (at Hemphill). ✆ **817/335-2041.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6–$11. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 6am–2:30pm; Sat 6–11am.

**Railhead Smokehouse** ★ (Kids) BARBECUE No Old West town can sit on its barbecue laurels, and Fort Worth has several new Texas barbecue joints to go along with the old-time favorites. Neither the newest nor the oldest, Railhead is one of the best. It's certainly slicker than Angelo's, but it still attracts the hats-and-boots crowd in their pickups, as well as soccer moms and families pulling up in Lexus SUVs for takeout. The smoky barbecue with tangy sauce gets rave reviews; the plates are heaping; and the ribs, sliced beef, fries, and cheddar peppers (cheese-stuffed jalapeños) are excellent; the chicken, though, gets universally panned. Come for absurdly cheap weekday plate specials and have a beer or margarita out on the patio, which is something of a happy-hour hot spot, or hang out at the lively bar, which often features live music. Cheap and filling children's plates are served, and you can also load up on barbecue by the pound, though I can't vouch for how well the stuff travels.

2900 Montgomery St. (at Vickery). ✆ **817/738-9808.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6.75–$13. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–9pm; Fri–Sat 11am–10pm.

### Tips Coupon Discounts

Visit the **Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau website** for money-saving coupons at major attractions, including the Stockyards, Museum of Science and History, Cowgirl Museum, and Billy Bob's Texas, as well as the airport shuttle. Go to www.fortworth.com/16coupons/16coupons.shtml and print out any of more than a dozen coupons.

## EXPLORING FORT WORTH

Despite its laid-back image and small size, Fort Worth abounds with sights, sounds, and things to do. Whether you're a cowboy, an aesthete, or a historian—or just plain folk—Fort Worth, an enjoyable, relaxed, and cultured city that's also remarkably well organized for visitors, should prove entertaining. There are three distinct parts, each a couple of miles from one another: the Stockyards National Historic District, the focus of the city's cattle-raising and livestock auction legacy as the cow town of the cattle drives north in the 19th century; newly revitalized historic downtown Fort Worth, a beautifully laid-out, clean, and renovated core; and the Cultural District, a world-class museum, arts, and architecture center with the superlative Kimbell Museum (perhaps Texas's finest art museum), the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, and the fantastic new Modern Art Museum. We'll take them in that order, though where you start should match with your interests in either art or a living museum of the Old West.

Plenty of attractions in Fort Worth are free; pick up the flyer *Everything Free to Do in Fort Worth* at the visitor center to find out how much you can do for no money.

### The Top Attractions

#### The Stockyards National Historic District ★★

Two miles north of downtown Fort Worth, off North Main Street, is the still-beating heart of Fort Worth's Old West heritage. The Stockyards National Historic District—where women police officers patrol on horseback, and a cattle drive takes place daily on the cobblestones of Exchange Avenue—is part Western theme park and part living history museum. The livestock industry's 1880s roots are here, and it became the biggest and busiest cattle, horse, mule, hog, and sheep marketing center in the Southwest (and quite a pocket of wealth). The 125-acre district encompasses the **Livestock Exchange Building,** the focus of old livestock business; **Cowtown Coliseum,** the world's first indoor rodeo arena; **Stockyards Station,** the former hog and sheep pens, now overrun with Western shops and restaurants; **Billy Bob's Texas,** known as the world's largest honky-tonk; Western shops and authentic saloons, such as the **White Elephant;** and the historic **Stockyards Hotel,** where bar stools are topped by saddles and Bonnie and Clyde once camped out while on the lam. Such Western heroes as Gene Autry, Dale Evans, Roy Rogers, and Bob Wills are honored in bronze along Exchange Avenue's **Trail of Fame.**

The **Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo** is held the last 2 weeks of January and first week of February. It's hands-down the time in Fort Worth to see a surfeit of rodeo performances, as well as the nation's oldest continuous livestock show. For information, call ✆ **817/877-2420** or get tickets at Ticketmaster outlets or online at www.fwssr.com.

## Christmas in the Stockyards

A fairly new tradition in the Stockyards, **Christmas in the Stockyards,** is held the first Saturday in December. Perfect for families, it features games, crafts, roping lessons, a parade, and Cowboy Ride for Toys, all of which is followed by the lighting of a 45-foot tree and Christmas carols. For more information, call ✆ **817/625-9715** or visit www.fortworthstockyards.org.

**Cowtown Cattlepen Maze** (Kids) A "Texas-size human maze," constructed to resemble the cattle pens of the Old West, is a fun diversion for kids (and older folks eager to test their skills against the labyrinth). Parents can watch from the observation deck to track how the kids are doing.

E. Exchange Ave. (across from Stockyards Station). ✆ **817/624-6666.** www.cowtowncattlepenmaze.com. $5 adults, $4 children 5–12 (additional trips to score a faster time, $3). Special group rates and unlimited 45-min. runs for birthday parties available. Daily 10am– dusk (5pm in winter, 8–9pm in summer). Closed Thanksgiving, Dec 25, and Jan 1.

**Stockyards Museum** This small museum, part of the North Fort Worth Historical Society, is located inside the historic Livestock Exchange building that dates from 1893. It displays artifacts—guns, barbed wire, furniture, and clothing—from Fort Worth's glory days. Have a look in the section on women at the exhibit of the 1920s Fort Worth Stock Show Queen's coronation and the 19th-century "bad luck" wedding dress, which "brought personal misery or disaster to everyone who wore it or planned to wear it." There's a livestock auction center inside the building, where you can see a few cowboys checking out the animals on the monitors.

131 E. Exchange Ave. ✆ **817/625-5082.** Free admission (donation requested). Mon–Sat 10am–5pm.

**Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame** Fans of rodeo and the cowboy life will appreciate this small museum, in restored horse and mule barns, honoring the stalwarts of Texas rodeo, including such (Texas) household names as Larry Mahan and Ty Murray. On display are the honorees' saddles, chaps, belt buckles, and trophies collected over the course of their careers. Also of interest are the fully restored 60 Sterquell Wagons dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. About an hour should be sufficient to take in the cowboys, though some visitors could do a run-through in half that time.

For those who want to broaden their knowledge of the Old West, the **National Cowboys of Color Museum & Hall of Fame,** east of the Stockyards at 3400 Mount Vernon Ave. (✆ **817/534-8801;** www.cowboysofcolor.org), pays much-needed tribute to a group of cowboys whose contributions were critical to opening the American West and are sadly often overlooked. The museum is open Wednesday through Saturday from 11am to 6pm; admission is $6 adults, $4 seniors, $3 students, free for children 5 and under.

128 E. Exchange Ave., Barn A. ✆ **817/626-7131.** www.texascowboyhalloffame.com. Admission $5 adults, $4 seniors, $3 children 3–12, $15 families. Discounts available online. Mon–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri–Sat 10am–7pm; Sun 11am–5pm.

### Tips Longhorn Express: Fort Worth Herd

Amazingly, the Fort Worth Stockyards still look the part of the Old West. To enhance the atmosphere even more, a twice-daily "cattle drive," the **Fort Worth Herd,** takes place on the main drag, Exchange Avenue (at N. Main St.), at 11:30am and again at 4pm. About 15 head of 1-ton longhorn steers, led by cowhands dressed the part in 19th-century duds, rumble down the redbrick street past the Stockyards, on their way to grazing near the West Fork of the Trinity River and back again to the Stockyards. Claimed to be the world's only daily longhorn cattle drive, it's perfect for photo ops. The best places to view the longhorns are the front lawn of the Livestock Exchange building and from the catwalk above the cattle pens. For more information, call ✆ **817/336-HERD** (336-4373).



### Historic Downtown & Sundance Square ★

Charming, unassuming, and remarkably unhurried, downtown's centerpiece, Sundance Square (named for the Sundance Kid, who hid out here with the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang, and a prime stop along the Chisholm Trail during the cattle drives of the 1800s), is 14 blocks of redbrick streets, late-19th-century buildings, and attractions that include the Bass Performance Hall, a couple of museums, and a pair of Art Deco movie theaters. It's a model of urban planning, and a real rarity in Texas: a place with sidewalks that invites nonmotored strolling. Downtown Fort Worth is lit up like a Christmas tree at night, and Sundance Square's bars and restaurants are the heart of downtown nightlife.

**Bass Performance Hall ★** Fort Worth's magnificent music hall, inaugurated in 1998 and funded entirely by private donations, is a spectacular addition to the city's already thriving cultural life. Touted as one of the top 10 opera houses in the world, Bass Hall is a handsome showpiece, constructed in a tiered horseshoe shape with excellent acoustics and great sightlines. The work of the architect David Schwarz (who built the Rangers Ballpark in Arlington and the American Airlines arena), Bass Hall is a 10-story, 2,000-seat jewel. Gracing the exterior are two huge limestone angels, trumpets to lips, heralding patrons to the evening's performance. Inside, the entrance hall is paved with cut Italian marble and the dome is painted with a Texas noonday sky, ringed by silvery laurel leaves. The bathrooms are charmingly decorated with notes from Dvorak's "Going Home." Guided tours—best for those with a keen interest in architecture—last about 45 minutes. Bass Hall hosts the Fort Worth opera, symphony, theater, and dance companies; see "Fort Worth After Dark," later in this chapter, for more details.

4th and Calhoun sts. ✆ **877/212-4280,** or 817/212-4325 information hot line. www.basshall.com. Free guided public tours given Sat 10:30am (performance schedule permitting); meet in East Portal at the corner of Calhoun and Commerce.

**Fire Station No. 1/150 Years of Fort Worth Exhibit** Tucked away in historic Fire Station No. 1 (which dates from 1907), this annex of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History tells the history of Cowtown from its frontier days and the Chisholm Trail cattle drives to present day. Good for a quick and painless overview of Old West history.

Corner of 2nd and Commerce sts. ✆ **817/255-9300.** Free admission. Daily 9am–8pm.

### Kids The Grapevine Vintage Railroad

To jump into the turn-of-the-20th-century Old West character of the Stockyards, don your best Western duds and hop aboard the **Grapevine Vintage Railroad.** The 100-year-old steam train of the Tarantula Railroad (purchased from Walt Disney and affectionately called "Puffy" by locals)—and its diesel brethren—makes the Trinity River Run, a 1-hour trip from Stockyards Station to 8th Avenue in Fort Worth, and another route travels along the Chisholm Trail to the Cotton Belt Depot in historic Grapevine, Texas. The trip to Grapevine is more involved and interesting (as well as more expensive) than the one that ends in Forth Worth. The name Tarantula stems from a tale in the late 19th century, when a local newspaperman's plans for rail lines were derided as looking like "the legs of a hairy tarantula."

Call ✆ **817/410-3123** or visit www.grapevinesteamrailroad.com for exact schedules and the running status of the steam train. The Trinity River Run round-trip fare is $10 adults, $9 seniors, $6 children ages 3 to 12. The Grapevine round-trip fare is $20 adults, $18 seniors, and $10 children ages 3 to 12.

**Sid Richardson Museum** Admirers of art depicting the Old West should tack a visit to the Sid Richardson, now reopened after a yearlong renovation by noted architect David Schwarz, onto a visit at the more important Amon Carter Museum (p. 143). This small but focused collection, which belonged to a Fort Worth oilman, comprises 60 paintings by Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, two late-19th- and early-20th-century biggies of Western art. The museum now has a new facade and galleries. If you're not a fan of colorful renderings of wagon trails and Native Americans on horseback, this may not be your glass of whiskey, but the museum does have a couple of great saddles with silver ornamentation. Allow about a half-hour.

309 Main St. ✆ **817/332-6554.** www.sidrichardsonmuseum.org. Free admission. Mon–Thurs 9am–5pm; Fri–Sat 9am–8pm; Sun noon–5pm. Free tours; arrange in advance.

### The Cultural District ★★★

Fort Worth is the cultural capital of the Southwest, with the finest art museums in Texas and the most impressive small art museum in the country. The city ropes off the Cultural District, making it an elite island by placing it safely apart from downtown business interests, a couple of miles west. Arts philanthropy has thrived in Fort Worth to a degree unmatched in Texas and many parts of the United States. Wealthy patrons and an enthusiastic city have welcomed some of the world's most celebrated architects, including Louis Kahn, Philip Johnson, and Tadao Ando, to create museums that make much larger and more cosmopolitan cities salivate with envy. The presence of the glorious new Modern Art Museum across the street from the Kimbell and down the block from Philip Johnson's expanded Amon Carter has entrenched Fort Worth as perhaps the top art and architecture city between the two coasts. South of downtown is an area of parks, gardens, historic homes, and the Fort Worth Zoo, considered one of the top five in the country.

**Amon Carter Museum of Western Art ★★** Having undergone a major expansion by the original architect, Philip Johnson, tripling the size of its galleries, the Amon Carter is a

### Tips A Water Break

Take a breather at the refreshing **Fort Worth Water Gardens,** designed by the famed architect Philip Johnson—4 acres of water (19,000 gal. per minute) cascading over cement and into five pools. At Commerce and 15th streets, downtown; call ✆ **817/871-7699** for more information.

splendid showcase for its wide-ranging collection of American art. The museum possesses the finest and most complete collection of works by Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, two giants of Western art, as well as a major photography collection (works by Ansel Adams, Man Ray, Elliot Porter, Robert Frank, Alfred Stieglitz, Walker Evans, and many others); early scenes of the West by John Mix Stanley and Albert Bierstadt; and important contemporary paintings by Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, and Stuart Davis. Amon G. Carter was the creator and publisher of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram.* His original collection of 400 paintings, drawings, and works of sculpture by Remington and Russell has grown to more than 300,000 works. I'd suggest allowing about 2 hours here, though fans of Americana may need even more time.

3501 Camp Bowie Blvd. (at Montgomery and W. Lancaster). ✆ **817/738-1933.** www.cartermuseum.org. Free admission (admission fee for special exhibits). Tues–Wed and Fri–Sat 10am–5pm; Thurs 10am–8pm; Sun noon–5pm. Free permanent collection public tours 2pm Thurs–Sun.

**Fort Worth Botanic & Japanese Gardens ★** Created during the Great Depression, this spacious showcase of more than 2,500 native and exotic species of plants in 109 acres of attractive gardens and natural settings is the oldest botanical garden in Texas. Its highlights include the Texas Rose Garden, 3,500 roses that bloom in late April and October; a serene, 7-acre Japanese Garden, which features waterfalls, a teahouse and meditation space, and colorful koi-stocked ponds; and a 10,000-square-foot conservatory of exotic plants and tropical trees from around the world. You can drive through roads in the gardens and park at several of the individual sites. Allow a couple of hours here, though it would be all too easy to while away an entire afternoon.

3220 Botanic Dr. ✆ **817/871-7686.** www.fwbg.org. Free admission to gardens. Enclosed conservatory $1 adults, 50¢ seniors and children 4–12, free for children 3 and under. Japanese Garden $3 adults ($3.50 weekends and holidays), $3 seniors, $2 children 4–12, free for children 3 and under. Botanic garden daily 8am–5pm. Conservatory Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 1–4pm.

**Fort Worth Museum of Science and History** Kids One of the largest of its kind in the country, with a domed Omni (IMAX) theater, a planetarium, eight exhibition galleries, and hands-on science displays, this museum offers tons of fun and adventure for families. Kids should eat up the life-size Lone Star dinosaurs (at "Dinodig" they can even hunt for fossils and dig for dinosaur bones), while younger ones can hang out at Kidspace, which has a puppet theater and materials for building a house. When the tots and parents get hungry, a courtyard cafe on the premises makes for a good stop. The Cattle Raisers Museum, which closed its independent location in 2007, will reopen within the Museum of Science and History in late 2009. Allow a couple of hours here unless the kids get cranky.

1501 Montgomery St. ✆ **888/255-9300** or 817/255-9540. www.fwmuseum.org. Exhibit admission $8 adults, $7 seniors and children 3–12. Omni admission $7 adults, $6 seniors and children 3–12.

Planetarium admission $3.50. Combination admission $14 adults, $12 seniors and children 3–12. Admission includes admittance to National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. Mon–Thurs 9am–5:30pm; Fri–Sat 9am–8pm; Sun 11:30am–5:30pm.

**Fort Worth Zoo** ★★★ Kids One of the top zoos in the country, the award-winning Fort Worth Zoo has a great layout of natural habitats and fantastic animals from around the world. I took my nephew here for his fifth birthday, and we had a total blast. The zoo has an African Savannah with endangered rhinos and giraffes; a Koala Outback with kangaroos, wallabies, and lazy koalas; and Komodo dragons, lots of apes, orangutans and rainforest monkeys, and white tigers. "Texas Wild!" is an 8-acre expansion showcasing native Texas animals and a late-19th-century town. New at the zoo are Malayan tiger cubs and African lion cubs. Allow 2 or 3 hours here, though your kids are unlikely to want to leave.

1989 Colonial Pkwy. ✆ **817/759-7555.** www.fortworthzoo.org. Admission $12 adults, $7 seniors, $8 children 3–12, free for children 2 and under; half-price tickets Wed. Mar–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct–Feb daily 10am–4pm (open until 6pm Sat–Sun Mar 28–Oct 19). Parking $5.

**Kimbell Art Museum** ★★★ One of the country's (if not the world's) top small museums is this remarkable and gracious place, the jewel in Cowtown's crown. In 1972, the great American architect Louis Kahn created perhaps his finest building to house the art collection of local philanthropist Kay Kimbell. His modern, natural concrete structure, a masterpiece of light, symmetry, and geometry, is a reference work in worldwide architectural studies. Its cycloid-shaped vaults are suffused with natural light entering discreetly through slatted skylights. The building is essentially a shell; it has no real interior walls, which allows curators total creativity to use movable walls to design exhibits. The TV art evangelist Sister Wendy Beckett calls the Kimbell "probably the nearest such an institution can come to perfection . . . one of the greatest achievements in the world." It is widely held to be the greatest museum building of the late 20th century.

The permanent collection matches the grace and drama of the building. Though small, it contains several superlative works, ranging from prehistoric Asian and pre-Columbian pieces to European old masters (Velázquez, El Greco, Rubens, Rembrandt) and the Impressionist and modern masters (van Gogh, Monet, Cézanne, and Picasso). Outdoors is a Zen-like, sunken sculpture garden by Isamu Noguchi. With its reputation as such an outstanding place to display and view art, the Kimbell receives some of the finest national and international shows that virtually every top-notch museum vies for. Past major exhibits have included "Portraiture in the Age of Picasso" and "Gauguin and Impressionism." Depending upon your interest in and the popularity of the current itinerant special exhibit, you might plan to spend a good 3 to 4 hours here.

3333 Camp Bowie Blvd. ✆ **817/332-8451.** www.kimbellart.org. Free admission to general collection; special exhibitions $12 adults, $10 seniors and students, $8 children 6–11, Tues half-price for all. Tues–Thurs and Sat 10am–5pm; Fri noon–8pm; Sun noon–5pm.

**Log Cabin Village** Kids Six mid-19th-century log cabins, presented as a living history museum, were transplanted to Forest Park southwest of downtown in the 1950s. The village includes a gristmill and actors decked out in pioneer costumes, who re-create the Old West of early Cowtown posing as spinners, candle makers, and blacksmiths. Pay a visit primarily if you need an inexpensive way to entertain the kids.

2100 Log Cabin Village Lane. ✆ **817/926-5881.** www.logcabinvillage.org. Admission $3.50 adults, $3 seniors and children 4–17, free for children 3 and under. Tues–Fri 9am–4pm; Sat–Sun 1–5pm (gates close at 4:30pm). Closed Dec 25–Jan 1, Jan 29–Feb 11, and Aug 20–Sept 2.

**Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth ★★★** The most noteworthy recent development in Fort Worth—and one of the most important on the national culture scene—is the Modern, a landmark design by the celebrated modernist Japanese architect Tadao Ando and a true notch on the city's belt. It is my favorite new museum—or work of architecture, period—since Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain. Opened in 2002, the museum, quickly hailed as a masterpiece, contains over 50,000 square feet of gallery space, making it second in size only to the Museum of Modern Art in New York among museums dedicated to contemporary and modern art. The galleries, of warmly textured poured concrete with 20-foot-high ceilings and suffused with spectacular natural light, are housed in three rectangular, flat-roofed pavilions built around a large pond. In fact the oldest art museum in Texas (chartered in 1892), the Modern possesses an impressive permanent collection of modern and contemporary paintings, sculpture, and works on paper by Picasso, Mark Rothko, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, Robert Rauschenberg, David Smith, Gerhard Richter, Francis Bacon, and Jackson Pollock, as well as an impressive contemporary photography collection. A sculpture by Martin Puryear, *Ladder for Booker T. Washington,* proves very popular with kids; it's a two-story wooden ladder reaching to the ceiling, ever-so-narrow at the top. Another piece not to miss is Ron Mueck's stunningly lifelike and creepy *Seated Woman.* The outdoor sculpture collection includes large-scale works by Tony Cragg, George Segal, and Antony Gormley and a massive piece outside by Richard Serra. Plan to spend at least a couple of hours here. The restaurant overlooking the reflection pool, Café Modern, is an excellent spot for lunch—one of the better restaurants in town, in fact.

3200 Darnell St. (across the street from the Kimbell Museum). ✆ **866/824-5566** or 817/738-9215. www.themodern.org. $10 adults, $4 students and seniors, free for children 12 and under, free admission Wed and 1st Sun of each month. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 11am–5pm. Feb–Apr and Sept–Nov Tues 10–7. Free public tours daily 2pm (no prior arrangement necessary). Call for information about artist-led tours (3rd Sun of the month) and lectures.

**National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame ★** Kids Opened in 2002 in a beautiful, Texas-style Art Deco building, the newest addition to Fort Worth's Cultural District recognizes not just cowgirls but the importance of an array of plucky women who shaped the American West. It's the only museum in the world honoring their pioneering spirit. A fun and educational visit for the entire family, the museum's interactive exhibits in three gallery spaces and a state-of-the-art theater depict cowgirls working their ranches, their role in the media and fashion (with displays of cowboy couture), and cutting horse and barrel-racing displays. A rotunda with 12 cool, glass murals that slowly change as you walk through the hall honors more than 150 notable Western women (from Dale Evans and the first woman to cross the Rockies to Annie Oakley and the artist Georgia O'Keeffe). The interactive exhibits are terrific for little cowpokes of both sexes; kids can hop on a (simulated) bucking bronco and get filmed (which can later be viewed on the Internet), have their pictures superimposed on old Western film posters, and listen to jukeboxes playing country tunes. Don't miss the gift shop, a great place to score such things as vintage suitcases, antique Western goodies, and rhinestone duds. Allow an hour or two.

1720 Gendy St. (west of intersection of Montgomery and Burnett-Tandy, next to Will Rogers Memorial Center). ✆ **800/476-FAME** (476-3263) or 817/336-4475. www.cowgirl.net. $8 adults, $7 seniors, $7 children 6–18, free for children 5 and under. Admission includes admittance to Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. Discount coupon available online. Mon–Sat 9:30am–5pm; Sun 11:45am–5pm.

**Thistle Hill House Museum** This historic 1903 Georgian Revival mansion, the former residence of two prominent Fort Worth families, has been lovingly restored with

period furnishings. The residence, rumored to be ghost-ridden, has an elegant oak grand staircase and a wealth of interesting details, including eight fireplaces, five full bathrooms, and, unusual for the period, electric and gas lighting and built-in closets. The 45-minute guided tour, which has recently really jumped in price, relates the curious anecdotes of the mansion's history. The cattle baron W. T. Waggoner built the home for his eccentric daughter Electra (who took milk baths and is said to have been the first to spend $20,000 in a single day at Neiman Marcus); it then passed to Winfield Scott, who made many changes in the home, adding its limestone columns; and it finally became a girl's school, later abandoned.

1509 Pennsylvania Ave. ✆ **817/336-1212.** www.historicfortworth.org. Admission $15 adults, $7.50 seniors, $5 children 7–12. Tours on the hour Mon and Wed–Fri 11am–2pm; Sun 1–3pm.

## Especially for Kids

Fort Worth is loaded with activities for children. The top choice among the options is the **Fort Worth Zoo,** one of the very finest in the country, with a splendid array of exotic animals in natural habitats. Kids can play and learn at the **Fort Worth Museum of Science and History,** which has an Omni (IMAX) theater and hands-on science displays, including Dinodig, where they can play amateur paleontologist. If the kids are restless and just need to get outside, take them to the **Fort Worth Botanic Garden,** with acres and acres of gardens, exotic plants, and tropical trees.

The **Stockyards National Historic District** should entertain little cowboys and cowgirls. Twice a day, a herd of longhorn cattle rumbles down brick-paved Exchange Avenue. **Texas Town** in Stockyards Station is a theme park of sorts: an Old West hotel, bar, outhouse, and jail, as well as a vintage ride park, with an antique merry-go-round. Actors in chaps and vests enact *High Noon* gun duels. Nearby, kids can try to find their way through the **Cowtown Cattlepen Maze,** designed to resemble the cattle pens of the Old West. An enjoyable excursion for families is the **Grapevine Vintage Train,** a steam locomotive (or its diesel substitute) that travels from Stockyards Station to 8th Avenue in Fort Worth and to historic Grapevine. Young cowboys and cowgirls will enjoy **horseback trail rides** at the Stockyard Station Livery (chuck-wagon dinners available for groups of 10 or more; call ✆ **817/624-3446** for more information), and, if you're here in January, the **Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo.** The gals may feel empowered by a visit to the **National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame,** which has cool interactive exhibits (such as filming yourself on a bucking bronco). If the kids are hungry for more Old West adventures, trot them over to the **Cattle Raisers Museum,** scheduled to reopen in the Museum of Science and History in late 2009, which depicts life on the range shown through talking ranchers and cattle and a theater presentation.

See additional family activities, such as Six Flags Amusement Park, in the "Arlington" section, earlier in this chapter.

## Organized Tours

Hourly guided **Walking Tours of the Stockyards,** with visits to the major sights, leave from the Visitor Information Center at 130 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/624-4741;** www.stockyardsstation.com/walking-tours.html). Tours cost $6 to $7 for adults, $5 to $6 for seniors, and $4 to $5 for children ages 6 to 12, and they are given every 2 hours, Monday through Saturday from 10am to 4pm and Sunday from noon to 4pm. The **Wrangler Tour** takes in the Livestock Exchange, cattle pens on the Cattleman's Catwalk, Mule Alley, Cowtown Coliseum, Exchange Avenue, and the old Hog and Sheep Barns (Stockyards Station). The **Cowboy Tour** adds a visit to Billy Bob's and a buck to the price.

**Moments** **Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo**

If you're in Fort Worth at the end of January and first few days of February, you can't miss attending the Fort Worth Stock Show (officially known as the Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show), which hearkens back to its earliest days at the end of the 19th century. At the Will Rogers Memorial Center near the art museums (on Amon Carter Sq.), you'll see horse shows and auctions, and be able to check out all sorts of livestock, from beef cattle to llamas and swine. There's plenty of entertainment during the show and also an all-Western parade on the first Saturday. The rodeo is especially lively during the Stock Show; tickets are $16 to $18. For more information and an exact schedule of events, call ✆ **817/877-2400** or visit www.fwstockshowrodeo.com.

See additional Fort Worth and Dallas tours in "Organized Tours" in the "Dallas" section of this chapter.

## Outdoor Activities

**BIKING, IN-LINE SKATING & JOGGING** Excellent for all outdoor activities are **Trinity Park** (near the Cultural District just north of I-30) and **Forest Park** (south of I-30). Depression-era Trinity Park encompasses the Botanic Garden and 8 miles of cycling and jogging trails. Forest Park is the site of another well-known Fort Worth landmark, the Fort Worth Zoo. The scenic **Trinity River Trails,** which run 35 miles along the Trinity River, are my pick for biking, hiking, and in-line skating. Pick up a map at a tourist information center.

Serious runners may want to come prepared to participate in (or watch) the **Cowtown Marathon** (including a half-marathon, 10K, 5K, and three-person marathon relay), which for 27 years has drawn runners from around the world to the Stockyards National Historic District in late February. Call ✆ **817/735-2033** for specific dates and other information. You can also obtain a monthly runners' calendar at ✆ **800/433-5747.**

**GOLF** Fort Worth has five public courses. **Meadowbrooks Golf Course,** 1815 Jenson Rd. (✆ 817/457-4616), just east of downtown, is one of the top 25 municipal golf courses in Texas. The popular par-71 course is set amid rolling terrain. Also at the top of the list is **Pecan Valley Golf Course,** 6400 Pecan Dr. (✆ 817/249-1845); it has two 18-hole golf courses: the "River" and the "Hills." **Rockwood Golf Course,** 1851 Jacksboro Hwy. (✆ 817/624-1771), has a short 18-hole course and an additional, fairly difficult 9 holes called the Blue Nine. **Sycamore Creek Golf Course,** Martin Luther King, Jr., Freeway (✆ 817/535-7241), is a 9-hole layout with narrow tree-lined fairways. And **Z. Boaz Golf Course,** 3200 Lackland Rd. (✆ 817/738-6287), west of downtown, is a pretty straightforward 18-hole course. Greens fees for all five public courses range from $8 to $22, depending on the day and time. For general information, visit www.fortworthgolf.org.

**HORSEBACK RIDING** **Stockyards Station Livery,** 130 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/624-3446**), offers horseback trail riding for riders of all skill levels (as well as wagon rides and chuck-wagon dinners). Trail riding costs $22 for the first hour and $15 for each additional hour.

**TENNIS** The swank **Worthington Renaissance** hotel (p. 131) has two rooftop courts available for $10 per day to nonguests; call ✆ **817/882-1000** to reserve. The public can get on an indoor or outdoor court at the **Don McLeland Tennis Center,** 1600 W. Seminary (✆ **817/921-3134**), or the **TCU Tennis Center,** 3609 Bellaire N. on the campus south of downtown (✆ **817/921-7960**), which has two dozen lit outdoor courts and five indoor courts. There are **public clay courts** at 7100 S. Hulen (✆ **817/292-9787**).

## Spectator Sports

See "Spectator Sports" in the "Dallas" section of this chapter for professional football, baseball, soccer, basketball, and more hockey and golf.

**AUTO RACING** The **Texas Motor Speedway,** I-35W at Hwy. 114, north of Fort Worth (✆ **817/215-8500;** www.texasmotorspeedway.com), is said to be the third-largest sporting complex in the world. It's the place to see NASCAR, Indy, and motorcycle racing. Plan on joining a crowd; more than 150,000 people can attend the races here.

**GOLF** Fort Worth's stop on the PGA tour is the **Colonial Invitational,** which takes place every May at Fort Worth's prestigious Colonial Country Club (✆ **817/927-4278** or 927-4280).

**HOCKEY** The **Texas Brahmas** of the CHL play from January to March at the NYTEX Sports Centre in Rockland Hills. Call ✆ **817/336-3342** or visit www.brahmas.com for news and ticket information.

**RODEO/LIVESTOCK SHOWS** Fort Worth's famous **Cowtown Coliseum,** 121 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/625-1025**), is the top place to see professional rodeo. Rodeos are usually every Friday and Saturday night (tickets $7.50–$15). Popping up frequently on the Coliseum schedule is **Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show,** a reenactment of the original, which was once the largest Wild West show anywhere. Events range from trick roping to trick shooting and are accompanied by Western music and an arena full of buffaloes, longhorns, and horses. For information and tickets, call ✆ **888/COWTOWN** (269-8696) or 817/625-1025 or visit www.stockyardsrodeo.com. Look for $2 coupons in the *Fort Worth Key Magazine,* available at tourist information offices.

The **Kowbell Rodeo,** about 15 minutes from downtown, has rodeos year-round on Saturday and Sunday nights, as well as bull riding Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings. Call ✆ **817/477-3092** for more information.

The big event in Fort Worth is the annual **Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show & Rodeo,** which is staged from the end of January to early February. The nation's oldest livestock show features a Western parade, auctions, and cowboys and cowgirls at the nightly rodeo at **Will Rogers Memorial Center,** located in the Cultural District at 3301 W. Lancaster (✆ **817/877-2400**).

## Shopping

### Great Shopping Areas

Fort Worth can't compare to Dallas as a shopping mecca (nor, I suspect, would it want to), but, especially if you're looking for Western clothing and souvenirs of the city's cowtown history, you're in luck. The top tourist area, the **Stockyards National Historic District** (and particularly **Stockyards Station,** a mall of pure Texan shops converted from the old sheep and hog pens) has plenty of authentic Western fashions, antiques, art, and souvenirs, many found in shops inhabiting historic quarters. **Sundance Square** in the downtown historic district is gushing with art galleries, museum gift shops, and

fashionable clothing and furnishing stores, most in turn-of-the-20th-century buildings. Along Camp Bowie Boulevard in the **Cultural District,** there are a number of art galleries and design-oriented shops. The **Downtown Fort Worth Rail Market,** a European-style market that bills itself as "Texas's First True Public Market," is located in the historic Santa Fe Warehouse, 1401 Jones St. (✆ **817/335-6758**). It has a good farmers' market and a couple dozen permanent merchants.

If you're in town during the end of November through mid-December, don't miss the **Western Mercantile show** (✆ **817/244-6188;** www.nchacutting.com) in the Amon G. Carter Exhibit Hall in the Cultural District. Besides demonstrations of cutting horses, there are booths selling custom saddles, boots, and every kind of Western paraphernalia you can imagine (as well as luxe custom horse trailers).

## Western Gear

Two of the best Western shops, for real ropers, urban cowboys, and rodeo queens, are on the Stockyards' classic Exchange Avenue. Family-owned **M. L. Leddy's** ★, 2455 N. Main at Exchange (✆ **817/624-3149;** www.leddys.com), with the big neon boot sign out front, is one of the city's oldest Western wear shops. Originally a boot maker and saddlery, it has fine cowboy duds such as handmade belts, formalwear, custom-made boots, and saddles, and the best-selling top-of-the-line cowboy hat, the pure Beaver. It has another, slightly slicker and "uptown" shop, called **Leddy's Ranch at Sundance,** 410 Houston St. (✆ **817/336-0800**), with a full range of boots and Western clothing. Across the street from the Stockyards Hotel, **Maverick** ★★, 100 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/626-1129;** www.maverickwesternwear.com), has such high-end Western wear as hand-embroidered shirts, saloon-ready 19th-century-style suits, and other swank cowboy duds. It also has a long bar, so you can grab a longneck while shopping and look the part of the cowboy or cowgirl you are (or hope to become).

Also in the Stockyards, **Ponder Boot Company** ★★, 2358 N. Main St. (✆ **817/626-3523;** www.ponderboot.com), is the place to go for custom boots. Step inside and choose your leather and get your own brand or initial on a boot that will last you a lifetime, for not all that much more than a top-of-the-line factory-made boot (most will run $600–$850). Georgia, the owner, will demonstrate the superior quality of one of her hand-made, custom boots using a pair of dissected boots (if you ask nicely).

**Peters Brothers Hats** ★, 909 Houston St., at 9th Street (✆ **800/TXS-HATS** [897-4287]; www.petersbros.com), has been around since 1911, stocking Stetsons and hats of all kinds, including Western fedoras and custom-made cowboy hats. Also check out **Retro Cowboy,** 406 Houston St., on Sundance Square (✆ **817/338-1194**), for women's Western apparel, sterling silver jewelry, and men's vintage shirts. If the duds at these rather upscale Western stores are a bit too dear for your cowboy wallet, check out **Western Wear Exchange,** 2809 Alta Mere, 183S at I-30 (✆ **817/738-4048**), a rare resale shop dealing exclusively in Western wear. If it's already broken in, you'll be closer to looking and feeling the part of a real roper.

Once you've got the duds, you need the tunes. **Ernest Tubb's Record Shop,** 140 E. Exchange Ave., in Stockyards Station (✆ **800/229-4288** or 817/624-8449; www.etrecordshop.com), has a great stock of honky-tonk, cowboy, and country-and-western recordings, including old vinyl and hard-to-find stuff.

## Antiques & Furnishings

**Bum Steer,** 2400 N. Main St. (✆ **817/626-4565**), just a block from the Stockyards' main drag, sells Western antiques, vintage clothing, chaps and saddles, mounts and hides, and those lovable antler chandeliers. Just up the street is **Cross-Eyed Moose,** 2340 N.

Main St. (✆ **817/624-4311**), run by the same folks and stocking slightly more affordable Western goods, some used clothing and antiques, as well as custom furnishings, game mounts, and Western decorative stuff. I picked up a great used pair of $10 boots here for my nephew. The **Antique Colony ,** 7200 Camp Bowie Blvd. (✆ **817/731-7252**), has some 120 dealers of antiques and collectibles.

### Department Stores & Malls

**Stockyards Station,** 140 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/625-9715**), once the Southwest's largest hog and sheep marketing center, has been converted into a cute center of several dozen restaurants and shops featuring Western apparel, Lone Star wines, country-and-western music, leather goods, Texas products, and arts and crafts. There's even a **Stockyards Wedding Chapel** (✆ **817/624-1570**) for cowboys and girls dying for a true Old West ceremony.

**University Park Village,** 2 blocks south of I-30 on S. University Drive near Texas Christian University (✆ **817/654-0521**), is an upscale shopping center with Talbot's, Williams-Sonoma, Ann Taylor, Voyagers The Travel Store, and Wolf Camera.

## FORT WORTH AFTER DARK

Despite its decent size, Fort Worth still feels like a small town, and plenty of young people looking for a bigger scene split for Big D on weekends. Still, Cowtown has a few good nightlife options, especially at the two extremes of the scale: high culture and cowboy culture. Whether you're inclined to ward opera, symphony, and theater, or up for some boot-scootin', Fort Worth has some fine venues. **Exchange Avenue** in the Stockyards is where you want to be on weekends for some hot Western swing, Texas shuffle, and honky-tonk tunes. The street becomes a cruising strip of souped-up trucks, guys and dolls in cowboy and cowgirl finery strutting their stuff, and dancers ducking into honky-tonks and cowboy discos. Meanwhile, **Sundance Square** is full of bars, restaurants, cafes, and movie theaters, and is mobbed on weekend nights (luckily, there's plenty of free parking after 5pm and on weekends right in and around the square). **City Streets,** 425 Commerce St. (✆ **817/335-5400**), is a one-stop-shopping entertainment complex, generic and mild-mannered but popular with visitors for its range of bars, lounges, and pool halls—and, of course, happy hours.

For listings, check out the "Entertainment" section of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* or check the weekly listings posted on its website, www.dfw.com. For tickets, try Arts Line at **Ticketmaster** (✆ **817/467-ARTS** [467-2787] or 214/631-ARTS [631-2787]; www.ticketmaster.com) or **Texas Tickets** (✆ **817/277-3333**).

### The Performing Arts

Elegant **Bass Performance Hall** ★★ (✆ **877/212-4280** or 817/212-4280; www.basshall.com) is one of the top places in the country to see a musical or theater performance. Home to the distinguished Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, its stage has welcomed an eclectic range of productions including *The Nutcracker,* Handel's *Messiah, Madame Butterfly,* Broadway shows (such as *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*), and pop, jazz, and country concerts by the likes of Tony Bennett, k.d. lang, Nanci Griffith, and Pink Martini, as well as dance/theater performances such as *Stomp.*

**Casa Mañana Theater** ★, 3101 W. Lancaster, at University Drive (✆ **817/332-2272;** www.casamanana.org), is the country's first permanent theater designed for the musicals-in-the-round. The aluminum geodesic dome with an oval stage recently underwent a $3-million renovation. Casa, as its known locally, has been around for more than

50 years, and it puts on a wide range of dramas, comedies, and musicals, and is home to one of the top children's theater operations in the United States, mounting productions such as *Aladdin*.

The **Jubilee Theatre,** 506 Main St. (✆ **817/338-4411;** www.jubileetheatre.org), is home to intimate African-American theater, staging such dramas as *Brother Mac* (adapted from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) and *A Raisin in the Sun,* as well as musicals such as *Lysistrata Please* (a rock version of the Aristophanes classic) and *Road Show,* an original production.

The **Rose Marine Theater,** 1440 Main St. (✆ **817/624-8333;** www.rosemarinetheater.com), a movie theater dating from the 1920s just south of the Stockyards, has been restored and converted by the Latin Arts Association; here you'll find plays in Spanish, Latin films, and other arts targeting the Latino population.

## The Bar Scene

The oldest bar in Fort Worth and the site of the city's most famous gunfight in 1897, **White Elephant Saloon** ★, 106 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/624-1887**), is an authentic Cowtown saloon, a great place to knock back a Lone Star longneck in the afternoon or check out some live Western music nightly on the small stage. The atmospheric bar is decorated with donated hats (from the likes of Ray Wylie Hubbard and Jimmie Dale Gilmore) and cases of porcelain and ceramic white elephants. There's also a nice beer garden, with live bands under the trees.

**Flying Saucer Draught Emporium** ★, 111 E. 4th St. (✆ **817/336-7470**), is a beer snob's dream, boasting 75 beers on tap and 125 bottles, including a slew of American microbrews and exotics such as Belgian *guerze* and German seasonals. For the novice or anyone looking for something new, there are "flights," sampler trays from around the world. The place can get rowdy on weekends with cigar-smoking types and TCU students, but it's still one of the best places in Fort Worth to wet your whistle. Food tends toward such beer-complementary items as bratwurst and beer cheese soup (yes, you read that right). It also features an eclectic roster of live music on weekends. A swank bar with an outdoor patio and live music in warm months, **8.0** (✆ **817/336-0880**), just off Sundance Square, is frequented by Fort Worth's young and beautiful. The outdoor rooftop bar **Grotto,** complete with waterfall, at Reata (p. 137) is another great place for a drink before or after dinner.

## Honky-Tonk Heaven

The one place that's practically a required stop in Fort Worth is **Billy Bob's Texas** ★★★, 2520 Rodeo Plaza (✆ **817/624-7117;** www.billybobstexas.com). A cavernous barn for prize cattle in a former life, this absurdly large honky-tonk, a symbol of Texas for many people, has it all. With 40 bar stations, a monster dance floor for hard-core boot-scootin', a rodeo arena, video games, pool tables, mechanical bulls, and pro bull riding, it's 125,000 square feet (er, 7 acres) of country-and-western heaven. Open for over 20 years, Billy Bob's continues to draw the biggest names in country music, including George Jones, LeAnn Rimes, Willie Nelson, and Jerry Jeff Walker. Its fame is such that you'll see real ropers in their best hats and tight jeans, drugstore cowboys, and a swell of German and Japanese tourists, all soakin' up the flavor. Located in the heart of the Stockyards, Billy Bob's does business Monday through Saturday from 11am to 2am, and Sunday from noon to 2am. The cover charge varies according to the musical act; day visits cost $1. Don't miss the pro live bull riding on Friday and Saturday at 9 and 10pm; admission is $2.

### Tips Everybody, Get in Line

If you want to learn to line dance, shuffle, and two-step like a Texan, why not do it in one of the most famous honky-tonks in the world, **Billy Bob's Texas?** Wendell Nelson is the dance man who will lead you—and even the whole family—through the basics. Free classes are Thursdays at 7pm for the family. Call ✆ **817/923-9215** for additional information. For a more intimate experience, waltz and swing classes are also offered every Wednesday at 6:30pm at Pearl's Dancehall & Saloon (✆ **817/624-2800**).

Another "Texas-size" honky-tonk is the family-owned and -operated **Stagecoach Ballroom** ★, 2516 E. Belknap at the corner of Sylvania, off Airport Freeway (✆ **817/831-2261;** www.stagecoachballroom.com), a real contender for most authentic old-time ballroom in Texas. It sports traditional country music and dance, and is a good spot to pick up some moves if you're not exactly a smooth-footed kicker. Wednesday is Ladies Night, and cover for live music guests is usually $15. (There is live music on Wed and Fri–Sun, beginning at 7pm. Thurs nights are newly dedicated to "smoke-free" C&W, Big Band, and Back to the '50s dancing, 6–10pm; $5 cover. Also, look for Lone Star Talent Night contests on Tues.)

Sadly, the poetically named **Big Balls of Cowtown,** one of my very favorite dance halls, where classic Western swing was practiced with a fervor, is no longer around. The space is inhabited by **Pearl's Dancehall & Saloon** ★, 302 W. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/624-2800;** www.pearlsdancehallandsaloon.com), featuring live traditional, Western swing and honky-tonk music Wednesday to Saturday. Although it's a bit spiffier in its new incarnation, it's still the coolest spot in the Stockyards for nontouristy C&W music (featuring name acts such as Dale Watson) and dancing. Free dance lessons are given every Wednesday at 6:30pm.

Also in the Stockyards District, there's often live country music at **Rodeo Exchange,** 221 W. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/626-0181**), and **Ernest Tubb's Record Shop,** 140 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/624-8449**), the latter only on Saturday afternoons.

## Other Live Music

Sadly, Fort Worth's premier jazz venue, **Caravan of Dreams,** bit the dust several years ago. And while nothing has sprung up to fill its big shoes, there are a handful of other live music venues in town that don't go the country route. **Sardines Ristorante Italiano** (p. 138) features the live jazz of Johnny Case. The top rock venue in town is the **Ridglea Theater** ★, 6025 Camp Bowie Blvd. (✆ **817/738-9500;** www.ridgleatheater.com), a hip, restored 1940s Art Deco theater that plays host to touring rock bands, including alternative flavors of the month. **Aardvark** ★, 2905 W. Berry St. (✆ **817/926-7814;** www.the-aardvark.com), is a cool small space that hosts a wide-ranging roster of pop, alternative rock, and neo-folk acts with small cover charges Tuesday through Saturday.

The top blues joint in town, celebrating 2 decades of the blues, is **J&J Blues Bar** ★, 937 Woodward St. (✆ **817/870-2337;** www.jjbluesbar.com), just north of the Cultural District. A little down 'n' dirty—how else would you want your blues bar?—it hosts both national and local acts Friday and Saturday nights, with shows from 10pm to 2am. The crowd is a mix of blues traditionalists and college kids from TCU.

For traditional live C&W, also check out the bands scheduled at two of the most famous spots in Fort Worth, **Billy Bob's Texas** and **White Elephant Saloon** ★★, as well as **Pearl's Dancehall and Saloon** and **Stagecoach Ballroom** (see "Honky-Tonk Heaven," above).

A sister of the clubs of the same name in Austin and Dallas, **Pete's Dueling Piano Bar,** 621 Houston St. (✆ **817/335-PETE** [335-7383]; www.petesduelingpianobar.com), has shows Wednesday through Saturday at 8pm; four expert pianists play pop and rock standards and encourage loud audience singalongs. Calling Pete's a "piano bar" probably doesn't do it justice; you won't hear Bach, but you will hear Johnny Cash.

## Rodeo

The **Stockyards Championship Rodeo** is held most weekends on Friday and Saturday nights at Cowtown Coliseum in the Stockyards, 121 E. Exchange Ave. (✆ **817/888-COWTOWN** [269-8696]; www.stockyardsrodeo.com). Tickets range from $4.50 for children to $15 for reserved box seats. **Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show** (p. 149) runs during summer months and holiday weekends.

# 6

# Houston & East Texas

*by David Baird*

Situated on a flat, nearly featureless Gulf Coast plain, Houston sprawls out from its center in vast tracts of subdivisions, freeways, office parks, and shopping malls. In undisturbed areas you'll find marshy grasslands in the south and woods in the north. Meandering across this plain are several bayous on whose banks cypress and southern magnolia trees chance to grow. Many visitors, imagining the Texas landscape as it is usually drawn—barren and treeless—are surprised by such green surroundings, but, in fact, the city is at the tail end of a large belt of natural forest coming down through East Texas, and the climate is much the same as coastal Louisiana and Mississippi—warm and humid with ample rainfall.

Houston is the fourth-most-populated city in the United States. If we compare the populations of greater metro areas rather than cities, then it ranks only tenth. Yet in geographical expanse Houston ranks second. The city is more than half as large as the state of Rhode Island and continues to expand outward. But in the past several years there has been a shift in residential construction toward downtown and the inner city. Town houses in the central part of the city are going up at a furious rate, and lofts, condos, and apartments are now a major part of downtown construction.

Houston is not usually considered a tourist destination; most visitors come for business or family reasons and are lured into playing tourist only after arriving. It's a business town, and the oil and gas industry remains the big enchilada, but other sectors have added so much to the local economy that oil and gas's contribution is now only about 50%. The Texas Medical Center is the largest concentration of medical institutions in the world. It's virtually a city within a city, with 14 hospitals and many clinics, medical schools, and research facilities. Construction and engineering companies also contribute much to the economy, and the newest big player is high-tech.

Houston's society is socially and economically wide open. Houstonians inherently dislike being told what to do, and this dislike cuts across the political spectrum: Opinion surveys show that gun control is highly unpopular but so is government control over reproductive rights. Among urban planners, Houston is famous (or infamous) as the only major U.S. city that doesn't have zoning, allowing the market to determine land use instead. On the plus side, this love for individual freedoms gives Houston a dynamism that is palpable and has brought a flood of newcomers from around the world, who have found here a welcoming city. Houston seems to be growing more cosmopolitan every day, as ethnic restaurants and specialty shops spring up throughout the city along with exotic temples and churches—Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Russian Orthodox—built much as they would be back in the mother country.

On the minus side, this is the land of Enron, the go-go company that preached to state and federal governments the gospel of deregulation and then abused its new freedom. Also, Houston struggles with an air-pollution problem that has the

local government painfully considering unpopular regulations to keep the city in compliance with the Clean Air Act.

In the field of the arts, one can find proof of the city's dynamism. Houston has an excellent symphony orchestra, highly respected ballet and opera companies, and a dynamic theater scene that few cities can equal in quantity or quality. There are some excellent museums, too, and, if art isn't your bag, there's the world-famous NASA Space Center, which is like nothing else on this planet. While you're enjoying the attractions, keep your eyes open and you can appreciate another thing Houston is known for, its architecture, which stands out for its bold, even brash character. This is, after all, home to the first dome stadium—the Astrodome—which was billed at the time as "the eighth wonder of the world." Several buildings are striking for their dramatic appearance as well as for their irreverence—one skyscraper is crowned with a Mayan pyramid, another wryly uses the architectural features of Gothic churches for a bank building, and a pair of towers in the Medical Center unmistakably represents two giant syringes. There is little that is staid about this city, and the more time one spends here, the more this is appreciated.

Early in the morning of September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike came ashore and passed directly over Houston. Though far enough inland to be protected from a storm surge, the city lies in an unprotected zone close enough to the Gulf to suffer the full force of a hurricane before it can weaken. Ike wrought widespread damage, and in a couple of instances probably generated tornadoes that produced heavy damage in highly localized areas. High-speed winds popped out the windows of a couple of the skyscrapers downtown, bringing heavy sheets of glass down on the streets below. Reliant Stadium's roof was seriously damaged, though the surrounding apartment buildings were left untouched.

At ground level, hurricane winds inflicted damage over a wide area, bringing down trees and power lines throughout the city. The damage was extensive, and recovery has taken a long time. It was 2 weeks before power could be restored to all of the city. Restoring traffic lights took even longer. And piles of debris are still being removed, months later. By late spring or early summer of 2009, even these signs of the hurricane should be erased. All that the casual visitor might see is the occasional closed storefront, where something such as a dispute over insurance has slowed renovation.



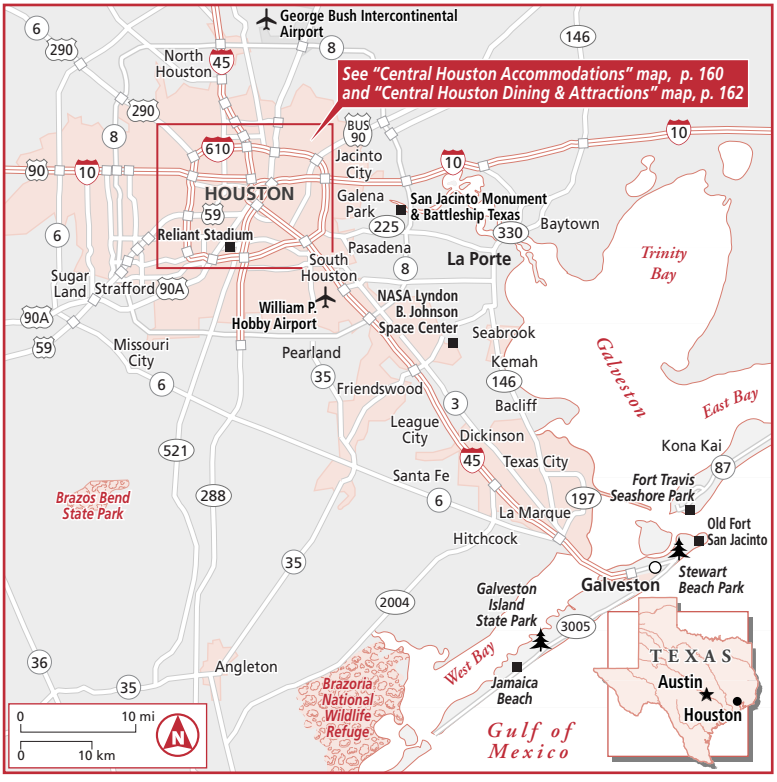
# 1 ORIENTATION

## ARRIVING

### By Plane

Houston has two major airports: the George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), 22 miles north of downtown, and the smaller William P. Hobby Airport, 9 miles southeast of downtown. Both shuttle companies listed below offer service between the airports.

**GEORGE BUSH INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT** Houston's primary airport (www.fly2houston.com/iahhome) functions as a hub for Continental Airlines, though it's serviced by all major national and international carriers. The airport has all the facilities of major international airports, including ATMs and currency exchange desks.




**Getting To & From the Airport** Taxi service from IAH to downtown costs $45 to $55 and the ride takes 30 to 45 minutes; getting to the Galleria area costs a few dollars more. **Super Shuttle** (✆ **713/523-8888** or 800/BLUE VAN (258-3826); www.supershuttle.com), ferries passengers to and from this airport to almost all hotels. Prices vary according to the hotel's location. To or from downtown costs $25, and $7 for each person traveling with you. Shuttle ticket counters are at all airport terminals. **Airport Shuttle America** (✆ **281/530-4000** or 713/270-4200; www.airportshuttleamerica.net) is a homegrown company. It goes anywhere around town (IAH to downtown is $15 one-way) and to Galveston, transporting cruise ship passengers back and forth. Another option is the **city's bus service** (✆ **713/635-4000;** www.ridemetro.org), which operates bus route 102. The fare is $1.25. Exact change is required, but dollar bills are accepted. Buses run about every 40 minutes, and travel time to downtown is an hour, a little longer for rush hour.

The major car-rental companies have counters at each terminal. John F. Kennedy Boulevard is the main artery into and out of the airport. When leaving the airport, you'll see signs pointing toward either the North Freeway (I-45) or the Eastex Freeway (Tex. 59). Both take you downtown, but the Eastex is shorter and usually quicker.

**WILLIAM P. HOBBY AIRPORT** Hobby Airport (www.fly2houston.com/hobbyhome) is used mostly by Southwest Airlines. All major car-rental agencies have counters here with either staff or a service phone. Taxis from Hobby to the downtown area cost about $30, and to the Galleria area $40. For airport shuttle service, see above.

### By Car

Houston is connected to Dallas and Fort Worth by I-45, and to San Antonio, New Orleans, and Beaumont by I-10. From Austin, you can take either Tex. 71 through Bastrop to Columbus, where it joins I-10, or Tex. 290 east through Brenham.

### By Train

**Amtrak** (✆ **800/872-7245;** www.amtrak.com) trains from New Orleans, Chicago, and Los Angeles (and points in between) arrive and depart from the **Southern Pacific Station** at 902 Washington Ave. (✆ **713/224-1577**), close to downtown.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau (GHCVB)** has an elaborate visitor center located in the city hall building at 901 Bagby St. between Walker and McKinney (✆ **713/437-5556;** www.visithoustontexas.com). Enter through the door on Walker. Here you can get lots of brochures, a range of city maps, architectural and historical guides, and answers from the center's staff. Pick up a copy of the *Official Guide to Houston* magazine; it has a helpful calendar of events. You can also play with the interactive computer stations and see a short introductory film of the city. The center is open daily from 9am to 4pm. If you're driving, park your car at the underground lot that is 1 block north of city hall. To get there, turn onto Walker, drive past city hall, and immediately turn right on Bagby, then right again on Rusk; you'll see a sign that says theater district parking 2. It's free for visitors; just get your parking ticket stamped at the visitor center.

For advance information, try ✆ **800/4-HOUSTON** (446-8786) or 713/437-5200 or www.visithoustontexas.com. You can request a copy of their *Visitors Guide.* Other websites you might find helpful are operated by the local newspapers. The *Houston Chronicle* (**www.chron.com**) is the daily newspaper, and the *Houston Press* (**www.houstonpress.com**) is the free weekly tabloid, which has a large entertainment section.

## CITY LAYOUT

Houston is a difficult city to find your way around in; it was built with no master plan, and most of its streets are jumbled together with little continuity. The suburban areas look alike and have indistinctive street names, usually ending in things like "crest," "wood," and "dale." To make matters worse, the terrain is so flat the only visible points of reference are tall buildings. But for the visitor, things aren't so bad. Most of the main attractions are not far off the freeways or other main arteries. With a basic knowledge of these, you can keep your bearings and get from one place to another.

To understand the layout of Houston's freeways, it's best to picture a spider web with several lines radiating out from the center, which are connected to each other by two concentric circles. The lines that radiate outward are in the following clockwise order: At 1 o'clock is the Eastex Freeway (Tex. 59 north), which usually has signs saying Cleveland, a town in East Texas; at 3 o'clock is the East Freeway (I-10 east to Beaumont and New Orleans); between 4 and 5 o'clock is the Gulf Freeway (I-45 south to Galveston); at 6 o'clock is the South Freeway (Tex. 228 to Lake Jackson, Freeport, and Surfside); between 7 and 8 o'clock is the Southwest Freeway (Tex. 59 to Laredo; look for signs that

read victoria); at 9 o'clock is the Katy Freeway (I-10 west to San Antonio); at 10 o'clock is the Northwest Freeway (Tex. 290 to Austin); and at 11 o'clock is the North Freeway (I-45 north to Dallas). The first circular freeway is Loop 610 (known as "the Loop"), which has a 4- to 5-mile radius from downtown. The second is known alternately as Sam Houston Parkway or Beltway 8. It has a 10- to 15-mile radius and is mostly a toll road except for the section near the Bush Intercontinental Airport.

In addition to the freeways, there are certain arteries that most newcomers would do well to know. Here are brief descriptions of each.

**Main Street** bisects downtown and then heads south-southwest, changing its name to South Main. It passes through the Museum District, then along Hermann Park and Rice University before reaching the Texas Medical Center. This stretch of South Main has lots of green space and is lined with oak trees. Beyond the Medical Center, the street passes by the Reliant Park football stadium, an exhibition center, and the old Astrodome.

In the middle of the Museum District is a traffic circle called **Mecom Fountain,** where South Main intersects **Montrose Boulevard.** Montrose runs due north from the Mecom Fountain crossing Westheimer Road and Buffalo Bayou. It gives its name to the Montrose area and is lined by several bistros around the Museum District. After it crosses the bayou, Montrose becomes Studemont and then Studewood when it enters a historic neighborhood known as the Heights.

**Westheimer Road** is the east-west axis around which most of western Houston turns. It begins in the Montrose area and continues for many miles through various urban and suburban landscapes without ever seeming to come to an end. Past the Montrose area, Westheimer crosses Kirby Drive and then passes by River Oaks, a neighborhood for Houston's rich folk. Farther along is Highland Village Shopping Center, then Loop 610, where it enters the popular commercial district known as the Galleria area or Uptown. Farther west, Westheimer passes an endless series of fast-food restaurants, strip malls, and chain retail stores as it runs through suburbia.

**Kirby Drive** is an important north-south artery. It intersects Westheimer Road by River Oaks and runs due south, skirting the Greenway Plaza and passing under the Southwest Freeway. Once south of the freeway, Kirby enters University Place, a neighborhood that curls around the western borders of the Rice University campus and is the favorite residential area for Houston's doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Kirby eventually intersects South Main Street in the vicinity of Reliant Stadium.

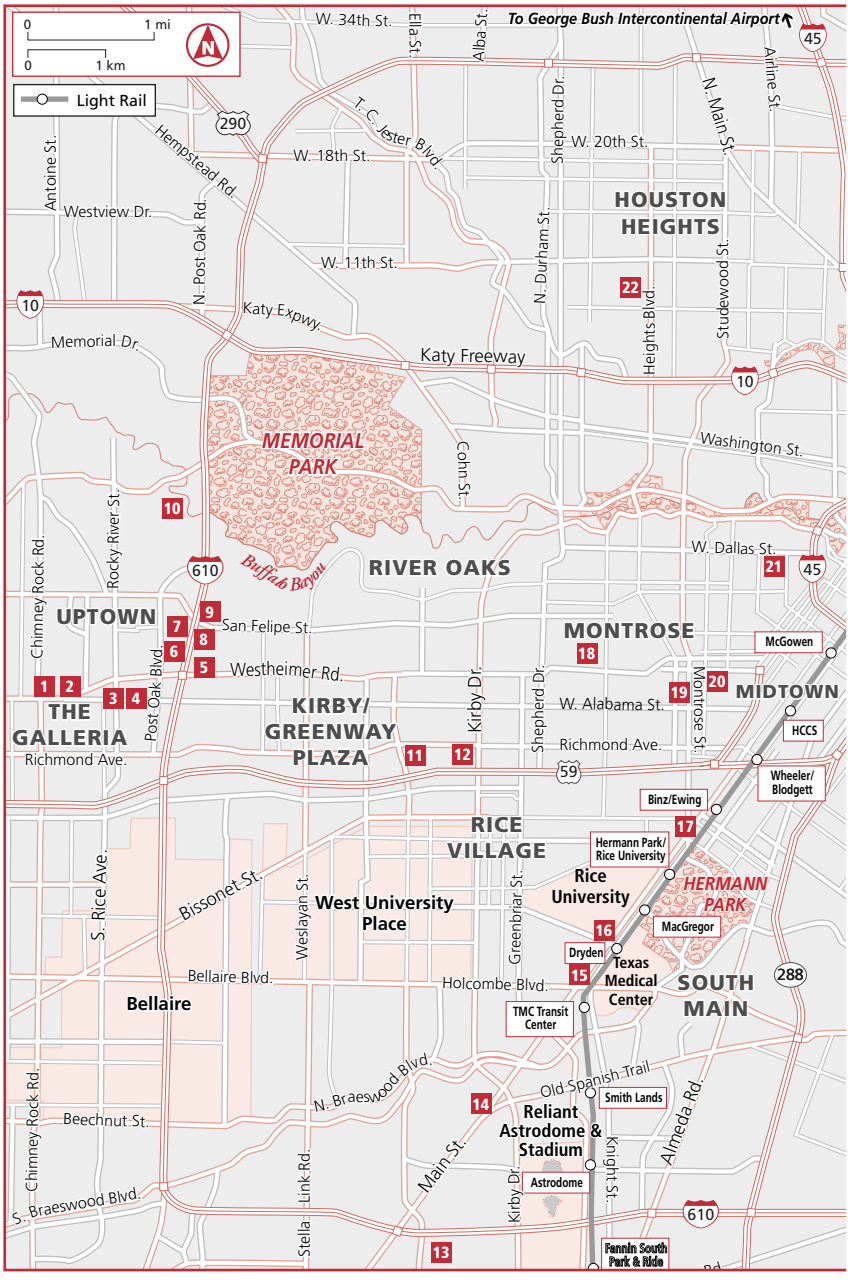


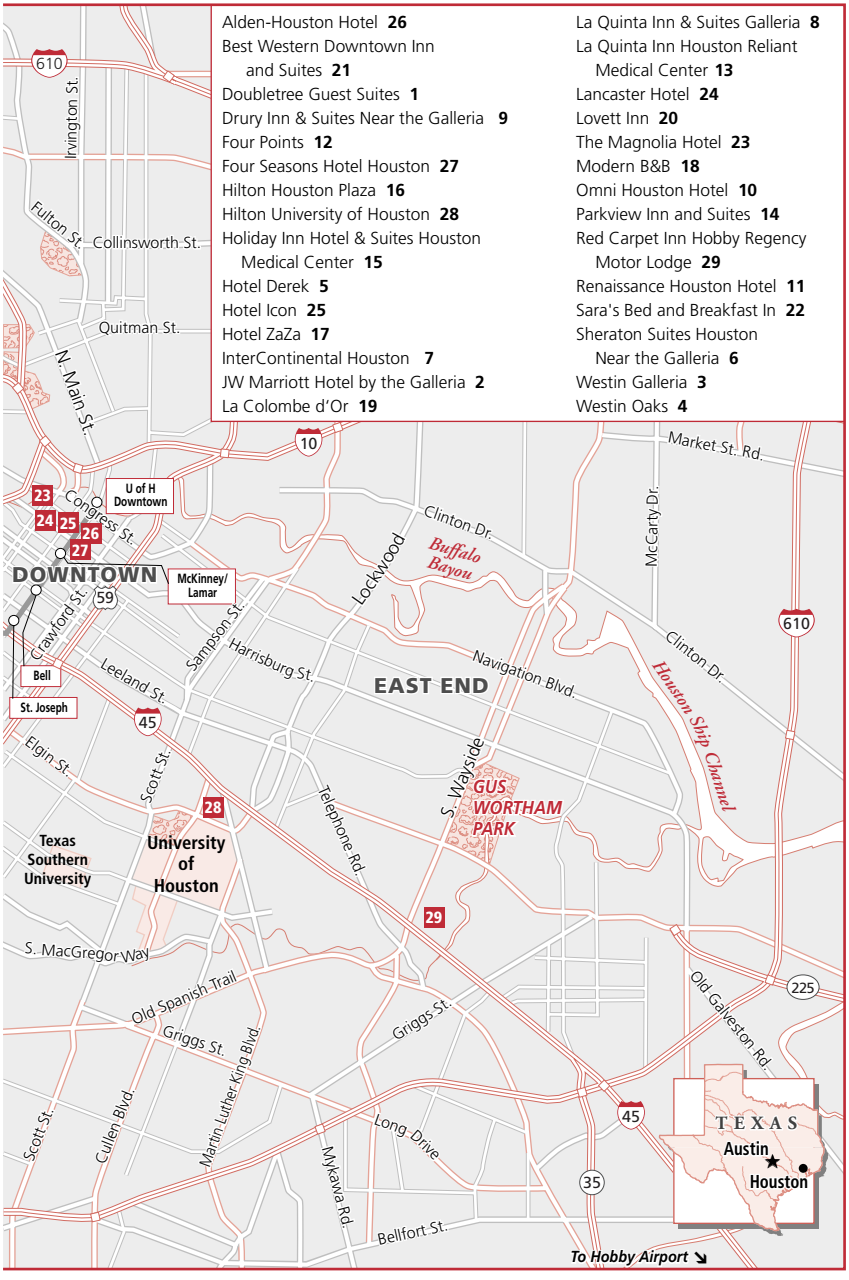
## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

**Downtown** Once a ghost town in the evenings and on weekends, downtown Houston is now the place to be. Restaurants and bars are opening (and in some cases closing) in quick succession. Hotels have multiplied, too. Much of the revitalization is taking place on the northwest side of downtown, in and around Old Market Square and the theater district, where Houston's symphony orchestra, ballet, opera, and principal theater company all reside. To the east, within walking distance, are the George Brown Convention Center; the baseball park, Minute Maid Field (formerly Enron Field); and the Toyota Center basketball arena. Also fueling downtown's revitalization is a light rail that runs up and down Main Street and connects to the Museum District and the Medical Center. Beneath downtown is a network of pedestrian tunnels lined by shops and restaurants, forming an underground city. As is typical of Houston, almost all of these tunnels are private, not public, developments.

# Central Houston Accommodations

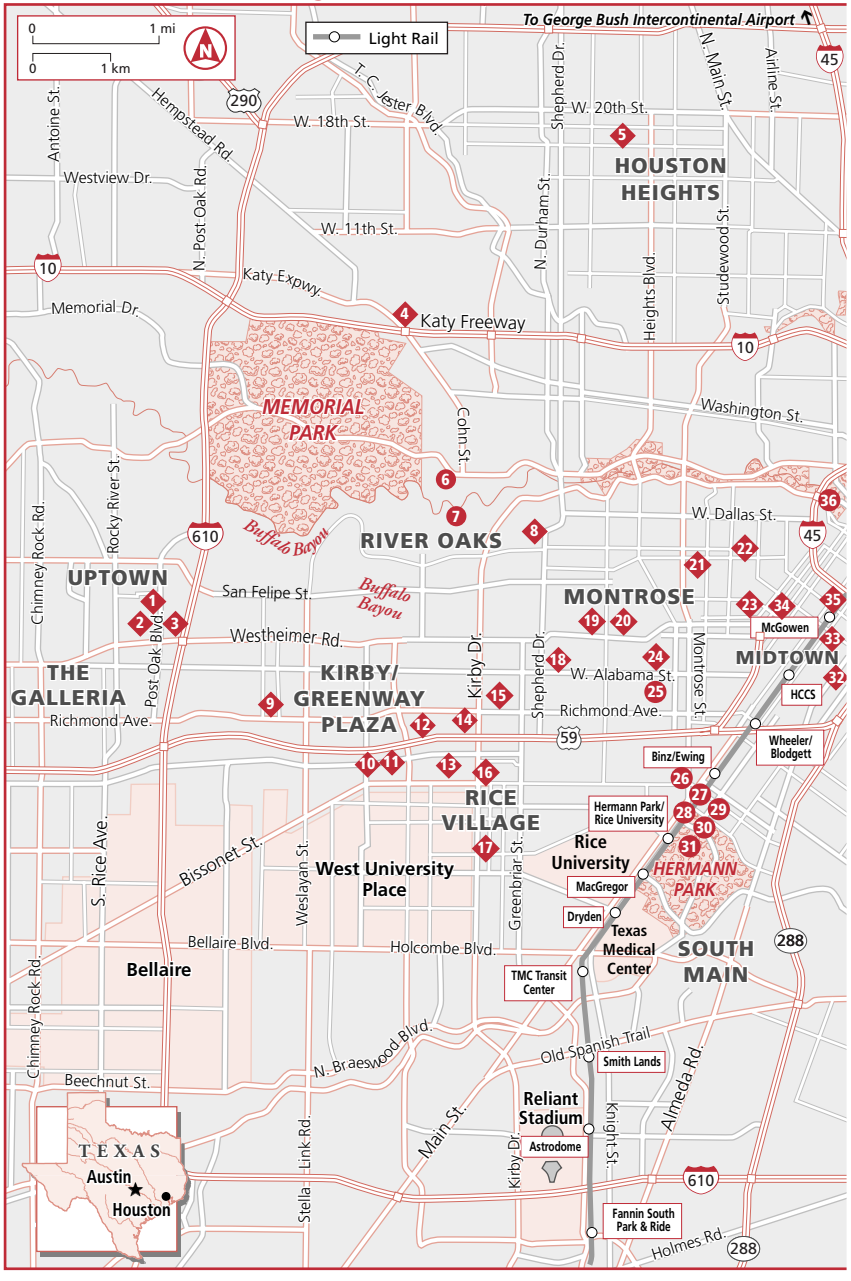


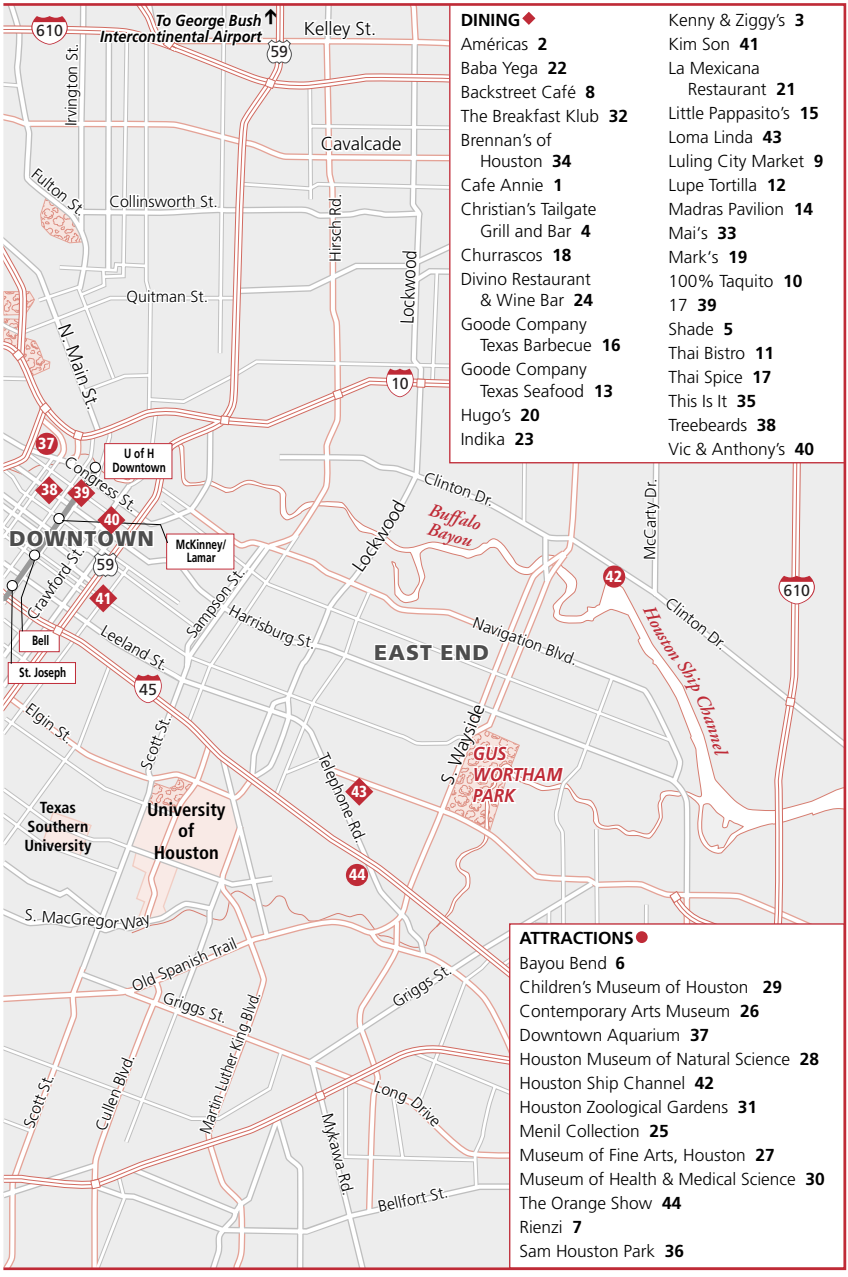



Alden-Houston Hotel 26
Best Western Downtown Inn and Suites 21
Doubletree Guest Suites 1
Drury Inn & Suites Near the Galleria 9
Four Points 12
Four Seasons Hotel Houston 27
Hilton Houston Plaza 16
Hilton University of Houston 28
Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites Houston Medical Center 15
Hotel Derek 5
Hotel Icon 25
Hotel ZaZa 17
InterContinental Houston 7
JW Marriott Hotel by the Galleria 2
La Colombe d'Or 19
La Quinta Inn & Suites Galleria 8
La Quinta Inn Houston Reliant Medical Center 13
Lancaster Hotel 24
Lovett Inn 20
The Magnolia Hotel 23
Modern B&B 18
Omni Houston Hotel 10
Parkview Inn and Suites 14
Red Carpet Inn Hobby Regency Motor Lodge 29
Renaissance Houston Hotel 11
Sara's Bed and Breakfast In 22
Sheraton Suites Houston Near the Galleria 6
Westin Galleria 3
Westin Oaks 4
610
Irvington St.
Fulton St.
Collinsworth St.
Quitman St.
N. Main St.
10
Market St. Rd.
23
24
25
26
27
U of H Downtown
Congress St.
DOWNTOWN
McKinney/ Lamar
59
Crawford St.
Bell
St. Joseph
Leeland St.
45
Elgin St.
Scott St.
Sampson St.
Harrisburg St.
Lockwood
Clinton Dr.
Buffalo Bayou
McCarty Dr.
610
Clinton Dr.
Houston Ship Channel
Navigation Blvd.
EAST END
S. Wayside
GUS WORTHAM PARK
Telephone Rd.
28
Texas Southern University
University of Houston
29
S. MacGregor Way
Old Spanish Trail
Griggs St.
Griggs St.
Martin Luther King Blvd.
Cullen Blvd.
Scott St.
Long Drive
Mykawa Rd.
Bellfort St.
45
35
225
Old Galveston Rd.
TEXAS
Austin
Houston
To Hobby Airport

# Central Houston Dining & Attractions








**DINING** ◆

- Américas **2**
- Baba Yega **22**
- Backstreet Café **8**
- The Breakfast Klub **32**
- Brennan's of Houston **34**
- Cafe Annie **1**
- Christian's Tailgate Grill and Bar **4**
- Churrascos **18**
- Divino Restaurant & Wine Bar **24**
- Goode Company Texas Barbecue **16**
- Goode Company Texas Seafood **13**
- Hugo's **20**
- Indika **23**
- Kenny & Ziggy's **3**
- Kim Son **41**
- La Mexicana Restaurant **21**
- Little Pappasito's **15**
- Loma Linda **43**
- Luling City Market **9**
- Lupe Tortilla **12**
- Madras Pavilion **14**
- Mai's **33**
- Mark's **19**
- 100% Taquito **10**
- 17 **39**
- Shade **5**
- Thai Bistro **11**
- Thai Spice **17**
- This Is It **35**
- Treebeards **38**
- Vic & Anthony's **40**

**ATTRACTIONS** ●

- Bayou Bend **6**
- Children's Museum of Houston **29**
- Contemporary Arts Museum **26**
- Downtown Aquarium **37**
- Houston Museum of Natural Science **28**
- Houston Ship Channel **42**
- Houston Zoological Gardens **31**
- Menil Collection **25**
- Museum of Fine Arts, Houston **27**
- Museum of Health & Medical Science **30**
- The Orange Show **44**
- Rienzi **7**
- Sam Houston Park **36**

South of downtown is **Midtown,** an area in transition, with town houses and shops gradually replacing vacant lots and small office buildings. Vietnamese shopkeepers and restaurateurs have settled into the western side, especially along Milam Street, where you can find an array of excellent Vietnamese restaurants with reasonable prices.

**East End** Before Houston was established on the banks of Buffalo Bayou, the town of Harrisburg already existed 2 miles downstream. As Houston grew eastward, it incorporated Harrisburg, leaving behind little of the old town. A small commercial Chinatown lies a couple of blocks east of the convention center; beyond that, the area is residential. The inner East End is an up-and-coming neighborhood of mixed ethnicity. As you move farther east, the residences mix with small-scale manufacturing, auto mechanic and body shops, and service industries for the ship channel. In the far southern part is NASA's Space Center Houston; Kemah, Houston's version of Fisherman's Wharf; and Galveston Island. Most hotels located in this area are along the Gulf Freeway. The main reason for staying here is that hotel rates, for the most part, are economical, and the location between downtown, Hobby Airport, and the above-mentioned attractions makes the East End convenient.

**South Main** South of downtown and midtown is the **Museum District** and Hermann Park. This lovely part of town has lots of green space. Most of the museums are within a few blocks of one another. Here also are the Houston Zoological Gardens and the Rice University campus. On the south side of the park begins the Texas Medical Center. A bit farther south is a complex of buildings holding Reliant Stadium and the old Astrodome. This part of town has many hotels to suit all budgets. The location is convenient, and the city's light rail connects this area with downtown.

**Montrose & the Heights** Directly west of downtown is the Montrose area, a hip, artsy, and colorful part of town known for its clubs, galleries, and shops. The Museum District extends into this neighborhood to include the famous Menil Collection and its satellite galleries, a must-see for any visitor interested in the arts. Upscale in certain sections, downscale in others, the Montrose contains a broad cross section of Houston society. It's also the de facto center of Houston's large and active gay community. North of the Montrose area, across Buffalo Bayou, is the Heights. It was conceived and built as an independent, planned residential community in the 1890s and remained so until 1918, when it was annexed by Houston. One curious fact about the Heights is that the original articles of incorporation required it to be "dry" (no sale of alcohol)—and this has stood in place ever since. Consequently, only a few good restaurants are here. But there's great shopping, especially for antiques and folk art. With downtown to the east, the Museum District to the south, and Kirby to the west, the Montrose area and the Heights are well located.

**Kirby District & Greenway Plaza** The area bordering Kirby Drive from River Oaks to University Place offers the most restaurants of any district in Houston. Near Kirby Drive's midway point, where it crosses the Southwest Freeway, is the Greenway Plaza, an integrated development of office buildings, movie theaters, shops, and a sports arena, which has been made over into a well-known megachurch called Lakewood. Farther south is Rice Village, a retail development consisting of

16 square blocks of smart shops and restaurants. It is phenomenally popular with Houstonians and visitors and attracts all kinds of shoppers and diners.

**Uptown** Farther west, all the way to Loop 610, is where Uptown begins. It is still informally called the **Galleria area,** after the large indoor shopping mall, entertainment, and hotel complex. But the district's business owners had to devise another name for it because the developer of the Galleria protected its name so jealously that it became problematic to use the word in any commercial context. Thus, we have "Uptown." Shops, restaurants, and other businesses front Westheimer and Post Oak Boulevard.

**North Houston** All the neighborhoods described above, except for the Heights, are south of I-10, which bisects Houston into northern and southern halves. North Houston is largely a mix of working- and middle-class neighborhoods and commercial centers and, with the exception of the Heights, has little to offer visitors. Over the years, developers tried to establish upscale communities here, but an inherent quality of suburbanism is that you can always build farther out, and, with each successive subdivision, the inner suburbs lose a little more of their luster. Ultimately, the developers took this to its logical extreme, skipping over vast tracts of land to build so far north that the city will never touch them. Thus, Woodlands and Kingwood, two upscale residential developments, are so far out that one can't consider them part of Houston.



## 2 GETTING AROUND

### BY CAR

Houston is organized around the automobile. Having a car is almost a necessity unless you confine your explorations to the downtown area and the South Main corridor (including the Museum District), which are connected by the light rail. This makes it possible to stay in a downtown or South Main hotel and go up and down this corridor with ease. For trips to other parts of the city, you can use the hotel's shuttle, if available, or the occasional taxi.

Houston's freeways are no place for the meek: Many drivers don't obey speed limits, bob and weave through the lanes, and make their turnoffs at the last possible moment. You should have a clear idea of where you're headed and what exit you need to take before you get on a freeway. All this said, I actually enjoy driving Houston's freeways. It's a good way to grasp what it's like to be a Houstonian. My own practice is not to bother looking down at the speedometer; for all practical purposes it's irrelevant. It's more important to stay in the flow of traffic at the same speed as most of the cars around you. As freeway systems go, Houston's is logical and has good directional signs. Traffic can be slow during rush hour or anywhere there's construction. You can use the **Texas Department of Transportation Info Hot Line** (✆ **713/802-5074**) to check for lane closures on local freeways. The *Houston Chronicle* provides this information, too, as well as info on street closures. Don't be surprised to encounter construction during your visit.

**RENTALS** The prices for rental cars in Houston are lower than those for many tourist destinations, but tacked on to the final cost are several taxes that raise the price by as much as 27%. Keep this in mind when the salesperson tries to upgrade you to a higher-priced model. As is the case when renting cars elsewhere, you probably don't need to buy extra insurance if you're already covered by your personal auto insurance. The major car-rental companies with locations around the city include **Alamo** (✆ 800/462-5266; www.alamo.com), **Avis** (✆ 800/230-4898; www.avis.com), **Budget** (✆ 800/527-7000; www.budget.com), **Dollar** (✆ 800/800-3665; www.dollar.com), **Enterprise** (✆ 800/736-8222; www.enterprise.com), **Hertz** (✆ 800/654-3131; www.hertz.com), **National** (✆ 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com), and **Thrifty** (✆ 800/847-4389; www.thrifty.com).



## BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

**LIGHT RAIL** The **Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro; ✆ 713/635-4000;** www.ridemetro.org) inaugurated its first light rail line in 2004. So far it's been a big success with locals and is quite helpful for visitors, as it ties together some of the main areas of interest—downtown, the Museum District, the Medical Center, and Reliant Park. Train tickets cost $1.25 and are valid as bus transfers if the ticket holder is not traveling in the return direction. Train tickets can be purchased at each station from vending machines that accept cash, debit cards, and credit cards. The other option is to buy a "Q fare card" for multiple trips and load it with as much money as you think you'll need. These are available at a wide variety of retail outlets. The trains run as frequently as every 6 minutes and in slow times are not more than 18 minutes apart.

***Note:*** In the past few years, there have been numerous collisions involving the light rail train and private vehicles. The train usually wins. Almost all of these accidents occurred because the drivers of the cars were distracted. Pay attention to directional signs and signals when crossing the rail line. There are a few confusing intersections: at the end of the line, where Main Street reaches Buffalo Bayou, in the Medical Center, and where the tracks shift from Main Street to San Jacinto. Otherwise, it's all straightforward.

**BUS SERVICE** The citywide bus service operated by Metro can get you to most places in the city. To find out what bus to catch and where and when to catch it, your best option is to call the customer service number listed above. The staff can tell you over the phone how to get from point A to point B. If you're planning in advance, you can use the website and click on "Trip Planners." Once you know the bus routes you're going to use, you can download schedules from the same website. The standard bus fare is $1.25 for travel inside Loop 610 (seniors pay 60¢ and children 3 and under ride free); exact change is required, and the machines accept dollar bills. If needed, ask for a transfer, which will be good for 3 hours for other buses or the train. Metro no longer operates downtown trolleys.

## BY TAXI

Taxis are plentiful in the city, but trying to hail one on the street can be an exercise in frustration. Call ahead or use hotel taxi stands. The principal companies are **Yellow Cab** (✆ 713/236-1111), **Fiesta Cab** (✆ 713/225-2666), **Liberty Cab** (✆ 800/TAXICAB [829-4222]), and **United Cab** (✆ 713/699-0000). Rates are set by the city: $4 for the first mile, $1.85 for each additional mile, plus a fuel charge, depending on the current price of gas.

## Fast Facts Houston

***American Express*** There is an office at 5085 Westheimer, Ste. 4600, on the third floor of the Galleria Mall II (✆ **713/626-5740**). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm and Saturday from 10am to 5pm.

***Area Codes*** Houston has 10-digit dialing for local calls. Local numbers begin with one of three area codes: 713, 281, or 832.

***Dentists*** For a referral, call ✆ **800/922-6588.**

***Doctors*** For minor emergencies or to see a doctor without an appointment, call **Texas Urgent Care** at ✆ **281/477-7490.**

***Drugstores*** **Walgreens,** 3317 Montrose Blvd., at Hawthorne Street (✆ **713/520-7777**), is open 24 hours a day. In the vicinity of the Medical Center, there is a 24-hour **Eckerd Drug Store** at 7900 S. Main St. (✆ **713/660-8934**).

***Hospitals*** The **Ben Taub General Hospital,** 1502 Taub Loop, at the Texas Medical Center (✆ **713/873-2600**), has a fully equipped emergency room.

***Internet Access*** If you're not traveling with a computer and your hotel doesn't have a business center, Houston's main library and all its branches have computers for public use; go to www.houstonlibrary.org to find locations. Faster connections can be had for a price at **Copy.com,** 1201-F Westheimer, in the Montrose area (✆ **713/528-1201**); it has several computers and is open from 7am to midnight on weekdays, 11am to 7pm on Saturdays, and noon to 9pm Sundays. If you have a computer and would prefer not to use your hotel's computer connections, check out the usual Internet haunts—coffee bars and restaurants and the public areas of certain hotels.

***Maps*** Salespeople, repairmen, and others who must travel about rely on something called a "Key Map," a binder of detailed maps that divides Houston into a grid system. This homegrown creation became so popular here that it has been copied by map companies in other cities. It may offer more information than most visitors want. You can buy standard street maps at any drugstore and at many convenience stores, and you'll find some helpful maps of downtown, the Museum District, and other parts of the city at the visitor center in city hall.

***Newspapers & Magazines*** The local daily is the *Houston Chronicle*. The *Houston Press,* a free weekly that covers local politics and culture, can be found around town at restaurants, stores, and just about anywhere people congregate.

***Police*** Dial ✆ **911** in an emergency; for nonemergencies, dial ✆ **311.**

***Post Office*** The downtown branch, 401 Franklin St. (✆ **713/226-3066**), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm and Saturday from 9am to noon.

***Safety*** Houston is a safe town for visitors. Exercise caution at night in the downtown areas that lie outside the theater district.

***Taxes*** The local hotel tax is 17%, the local sales tax 8.25%.

***Transit Information*** Call the Texas Dept. of Transportation's hot line ✆ **713/802-5074.**

***Weather*** Call ✆ **713/228-8703.**

## 3 WHERE TO STAY

Downtown and the Uptown/Galleria area have most of the city's luxury hotels. Both are great locations for getting to know the city. Recently, so many hotels have been built downtown that there is an oversupply of rooms. Rates have fallen considerably and deals and packages are available. Houston is a business-driven city, so discounted weekend rates are quite common. Some of the fancy hotels that cater to business travelers discount a lot more than the medium-range hotels, so for just a few extra dollars you can get a much better room and location. In choosing a hotel, don't forget to give some thought about where you'll be spending your time in Houston. See "The Neighborhoods in Brief" section, earlier in this chapter.

The hotel listings that follow include the normal rates for double occupancy. Rates will go higher for the rodeo in February and during large conventions. You should use this as a basis for comparison and not think of these prices as etched in stone. Always ask about promotional rates. There is a 17% hotel tax, which is not included in the rates shown here and is rarely included in hotel price quotes.



### DOWNTOWN

#### Very Expensive

**Four Seasons Hotel Houston ★★★** This member of the luxury hotel chain does everything right. It stands out especially in the areas of service (reliable concierge, attentive staff, and a luxury spa) and spaciousness (everything about the hotel is large—guest rooms, suites, and all common areas). Rooms are decorated traditionally: draperies with valances, furniture with neoclassical lines, upholstery with brocades and other rich fabrics. What impresses me the most about this hotel is the ease with which services are provided. Need a fridge, a fax machine, or a VCR delivered to your room? No problem. Need your suit dry-cleaned at 2 in the morning for use later that day? No problem. The hotel can do this because it employs a large staff. The location is convenient, by the city's convention center, baseball park, and basketball arena. Connected to the hotel are a small shopping center and the Houston Center Athletic Club, whose facilities are available to guests free of charge. (The hotel has a large, well-equipped health club of its own and offers guests access to a nearby racquet club, too.) The hotel's restaurant, Quattro, is an Italian grill that has won much praise from food critics. In 2009, the hotel is undergoing a $25-million renovation. The pool, which is on the fourth floor, has been completely overhauled and now looks in size and style like a resort hotel pool, with views of the surrounding skyline. The health club is going to expand, and the guest rooms will be thoroughly remodeled. They will still be traditional in style, but with modern accents and sleeker lines.

1300 Lamar St., Houston, TX 77010. ✆ **800/332-3442** or 713/650-1300. Fax 713/276-4787. www.fourseasons.com/houston. 404 units. $345–$495 double; $495–$545 executive suite; $850 and up specialty suites. Weekend rates and packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $26. Pets 15 lb. and under allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; large outdoor pool; health club; spa; sauna; concierge; courtesy car; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; 24-hr. laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

#### Expensive

**Alden-Houston Hotel ★★★** This hotel, originally called the Sam Houston, was taken over by Alden Hotels in 2005. The decor is modern, and I use "modern" in the

best of senses—sleek, uncluttered interiors that seek simplicity but avoid the "lab" look, which always leaves me with a chill. The guest rooms exert a comforting, quieting influence—a respite from bustling downtown Houston. They also rack up lots of style points with unexpected touches, such as nicely chosen fixtures and sharply dressed beds. The standard rooms are medium size and have ample, very attractive bathrooms. The two kinds of suites are larger and come with extras such as plasma TVs. But the electronics in all the rooms are quite good, and there's a DVD library free for the use of guests. The original Sam Houston Hotel was opened in the '20s and closed in the '70s. At that time, its location wasn't in the best part of downtown; now the location is great, just 2 blocks from the ballpark and Main Street. For more about the hotel's highly acclaimed restaurant, **17,** see "Where to Dine," later in this chapter.

1117 Prairie St., Houston, TX 77002. ✆ **877/348-8800** or 832/200-8800. Fax 832/200-8811. www.alden hotels.com. 97 units. $159–$179 standard; $229–$304 suite. Special weekend rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. Pets under 20 lb. allowed with a $150 deposit and $25 service fee per day. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; state-of-the-art fitness center; concierge; car rental; courtesy car; 24-hr. room service; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Hotel Icon** ★★★ I like a hotel that's not afraid of a bit of fringe, a splash of gold damask, a touch of refined decadence. So many hotels I see opt for the zero-risk approach to traditionalism: conservative furniture with American Colonial or neoclassical elements—what I call the George-Washington-slept-here look. Hotel Icon goes more for the Lola-Montez-slept-here look: lots of texture and ornament, and a "boudoir" feel to the rooms, all of which makes the Icon a fun place to stay. In renovating the Union National Bank Building (built in 1912), the designers sought to capture something of the feel of that golden age of refinement and exuberance. The most fun is to be had in the suites on the top floor, each named after a glorious old hotel. These rooms are extralarge and extraplush and touched by a bit of idiosyncrasy. The standard rooms also offer atmosphere and amenities. The higher rate is for rooms with extralarge bathrooms equipped with a pass-through above the bathtub that opens up to the bedroom.

220 Main St., Houston, TX 77002. ✆ **800/323-7500** or 713/224-4266. Fax 713/223-3223. www.hotelicon.com. 135 units. $150–$250 double; from $349 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness center; spa; concierge; courtesy limo; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Lancaster Hotel** ★★★ For those who enjoy the performing arts and nightlife, there is no better place to stay in Houston. Within 1 block of the Lancaster are the symphony, the ballet, the opera, and the Alley Theatre (see "Houston After Dark," later in this chapter), and when reserving a room, you can have the concierge buy tickets for performances at any of these venues as well as others in the Theater District. Also a block away is Bayou Place, where you can catch a movie or a live blues or rock act, and within a few blocks are many restaurants and clubs. The hotel occupies a small 12-story building that dates from the 1920s and looks all the smaller for being near the Chase Tower (the tallest skyscraper west of the Mississippi). Rooms are a little smaller than their counterparts at other downtown hotels, but furnished with more of the character of an old hotel. Bathrooms are ample and have lots of counter space. Service is excellent and includes many personal touches.

701 Texas Ave., Houston, TX 77002. ✆ **800/231-0336** or 713/228-9500. Fax 713/223-4528. www.thelancasterhouston.com. 93 units. $100–$200 standard; $200–$350 suite. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $30. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness room; concierge; courtesy car; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; overnight laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/pay movies, CD player, fax, Wi-Fi and high-speed Internet access, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**The Magnolia Hotel ★★** Opened in 2003 in what was the Houston Post Dispatch Building (1920s), the Magnolia goes for an anachronistic blend of new and old. The guest rooms mix gold scalloped trim and traditional patterned fabrics with the clean lines of modern furniture. The overall effect is charming and comfortable and can hardly go out-of-date. Rooms are large. The bathrooms have quality amenities and fixtures. Suites are very large and come with a full kitchen and dining area. The studio suites are especially attractive and come with a kitchenette. The mezzanine club offers a free continental breakfast in the morning, and cocktails and snacks in the afternoon and evening (the hotel doesn't have a restaurant but does have a kitchen for room service). This club is designed to be a comfortable place where guests can relax outside the four walls of their hotel room, socialize, perhaps play a little billiards in the game room, read the paper in the library, or surf the Web over a drink (the club is set up for high-speed wireless access). The lower rates listed below are for weekends.

1100 Texas Ave., Houston, TX 77002. ✆ **888/915-1110** or 713/221-0011. Fax 713/221-0022. www.magnoliahotels.com. 314 units. $129–$199 standard; $199–$269 studio suite; $329 1-bedroom suite. Rates include continental breakfast and evening cocktails. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $24. **Amenities:** Bar; heated rooftop pool; fitness center; Jacuzzi; game room; concierge; courtesy car; secretarial services; limited 24-hr. room service; overnight laundry service/dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

### Moderate

**Best Western Downtown Inn and Suites** Located in the shadow of downtown's skyline, this hotel offers convenient location and extralarge rooms with one king-size or two queen-size beds. On the downside, style takes a back seat to comfort and convenience, and there's no restaurant or room service. The greatest savings are had during the week; for a weekend, I would check rates at the nicer downtown hotels, which give better discounts.

915 W. Dallas St., Houston, TX 77019. ✆ **800/528-1234** or 713/571-7733. Fax 713/571-6680. www.bestwestern.com. 77 units. $159 double; $169 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free guarded parking. **Amenities:** Covered outdoor pool; fitness room; Jacuzzi; courtesy shuttle; overnight laundry service; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## EAST END

### Expensive

**Drury Inn & Suites Houston Hobby** Value This hotel, in the vicinity of the Hobby Airport, is virtually identical (except in price) to the Drury Inn & Suites Near the Galleria (p. 178). It's worth your while to check prices here because the rooms and amenities are competitively priced and discounted a lot during the weekend, and the property is well managed. Suites are large and come with a fridge and microwave. Complimentary cocktails are served in the afternoon from Monday to Thursday. Guests also receive an hour of free long-distance calls within the U.S.

7902 Mosley Rd., Houston, TX 77061. ✆ **800/378-7946** or ✆/fax 713/941-4300. www.druryhotels.com. 134 units. $160–$190 double; $170–$190 king; $200–$210 suite. Rates include breakfast buffet. Weekend and Internet specials available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets accepted with restrictions. **Amenities:** Heated indoor/outdoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; coin-op laundry; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Hilton University of Houston** This is unlike any other Hilton Hotel in that it is part of the Conrad Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management and is staffed by not only professional full-timers, but also students performing their lab work. It deserves consideration because of its location on the university campus between downtown and the attractions in Houston's southeast side and its service, which is often quite good. Rooms throughout the hotel's eight floors are large L-shaped layouts with modern furnishings that include a sleeper sofa. Eric's, the hotel's restaurant, is far better than most hotel restaurants and offers a menu with a Latin flair. The University Center next door has a health club, large pool, game room, and beauty salon, all of which the guests have access to. Note that the parking garage has a low ceiling and cannot accommodate vehicles such as large SUVs and pickup trucks.

4800 Calhoun Rd., Houston, TX 77004. ✆ **800/HOTELUH** (468-3584) or 713/741-2447. Fax 713/743-2472. www.hilton.com. 86 units. $169–$249 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Parking $7. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; limited room service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Inexpensive

**Red Carpet Inn Hobby Regency Motor Lodge** This place is cheap and offers an adventure into working-class, urban-cowboy Houston. The rooms aren't much to look at—midsize with '70s furniture and imitation wood paneling. The real character of the place comes from the restaurant and the lounge. The former is a roadside Tex-Mex joint; the latter is a good example of the typical Houston blue-collar bar with red carpet that smells of stale beer, a pool table, dartboards, and a TV always tuned to sports. The location is a bonus.

6161 Gulf Fwy., Houston, TX 77023. ✆ **800/928-2871** or 713/928-2871. Fax 713/928-3050. www.redcarpetinn-houston.com. 150 units. $50–$60 double. Weekly rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool (open in season); coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV.

## SOUTH MAIN

### Very Expensive

**Hotel ZaZa ★★★** What we have here may be the perfect marriage of old property and new owners. This once was the Warwick Hotel and it enjoys a great location in the center of the Museum District, which is close by Hermann Park and Rice University—the greenest part of the city. Rooms are done up with flair, and the more expensive the room, the more the flair. The hotel is 12 stories tall. At the top of the building and the room rate chart are the expensive "concept suites," which are definitely for the party set and put you right into vacation mode. Style elements across the range of all rooms include lots of textures, including silk and leather, and a better job of lighting than other hotels, adding a touch more drama. About 100 rooms have balconies, most of which are balcony kings, which are a little smaller than the majority of the rooms, but the views are good from just about any direction. There is an attractive pool and terrace on the second floor, overlooking Mecom fountain. Bordering it are guest rooms that are popular with sun worshipers.

5701 Main St., Houston, TX 77005. ✆ **888/880-3244** or 713/526-1991. Fax 713/526-0359. www.hotelzazahouston.com. 315 units. $235–$255 double; $375 and up suites. AE, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $21. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; fitness center; spa; concierge; courtesy shuttle; business center; room service; in-room massage; laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access, minibar, hair dryer.

## Expensive

**Hilton Houston Plaza ★★** In terms of amenities, service, and location, this is one of the best hotels around the Medical Center. Consequently, it enjoys a high occupancy rate, especially with people attending medical conferences. As the occupancy rate increases, so do the prices. Weekend rates can be a bargain here. Try to book early, and, if you have any flexibility, get rates for different dates. Most of the rooms are suites, which, for the money, are a better value than their standard king room.

The hotel's facilities set this hotel apart from neighboring hotels. The large rooms are comfortable and well furnished. The building is 19 stories tall. Ask for a room facing out over Rice University. The hotel's location on the rim of the Medical Center can actually be an advantage over its principal Medical Center rivals (a Marriott and a Crowne Plaza) because it makes getting to and from the hotel easier, avoiding the Medical Center traffic jams and the tight parking garages.

6833 Travis St., Houston, TX 77030. ✆ **800/HILTONS** (445-8667) or 713/313-4000. Fax 713/313-4660. www.houstonplaza.hilton.com. 181 units. $120–$220 double; $140–$260 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $19; self-parking $12. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; large outdoor heated pool; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; courtesy shuttle; business center; limited room service; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## Moderate

**Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites Houston Medical Center** This hotel has a good location across from the Medical Center, at the intersection with Holcombe Boulevard. The hotel often offers big discounts on weekend rates. Rooms are comfortable but furnished with little effort to hide their institutional feel. (Extensive remodeling in 2007 improved matters.) Some suites have full kitchens. What's not to like is the shortage of staff at the front desk and guest services, which makes getting attended to an exercise in patience. The same is true for the hotel restaurant.

6800 S. Main St., Houston, TX 77035. ✆ **800/HOLIDAY** (465-4329) or 713/528-7744. Fax 713/528-6983. www.holiday-inn.com. 285 units. $90–$145 double; $165–$190 suite; $300 and up apartment. Medical rates for hospital outpatients available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small pool; fitness room; courtesy shuttle; salon; limited room service; overnight laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## Inexpensive

**La Quinta Inn Houston Reliant Medical Center** Value This two-story motel is just down the road from the Astrodome and Reliant Stadium. The rooms include extras such as free local calls and large TVs. Bathrooms are spacious and well lit. The guest rooms are comfortable and attractive, albeit unmistakably motel-like. More important is the fact that they shield out the noise from the freeway; this place is remarkably quiet inside the rooms. The location, next to Loop 610 South, is good for getting around to the most popular parts of the city. It's a straight shot to the Galleria/Uptown area on the freeway, and to the Rice Village, via Buffalo Speedway.

9911 Buffalo Speedway (at Loop 610), Houston, TX 77054. ✆ **800/531-5900** or 713/668-8082. Fax 713/668-0821. www.laquinta.com. 115 units. $89–$109 double. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool (open in season). *In room:* A/C, TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Parkview Inn and Suites** This is a simple motel with two stories of rooms lining a large parking lot. The quietest rooms are the ones at the back of the property; the front ones can be noisy. All rooms have simple painted-wood furniture and two full-size beds or a king size; suites come with a small fridge and a microwave, which makes them a value for people wanting to save money on dining. Suites are twice the size of the standard rooms and come with kitchenettes, dining table and chairs, and a sleeper sofa. Bathrooms are clean but small.

9000 S. Main St., Houston, TX 77025. ✆ **713/666-4151.** Fax 713/666-3393. www.bestvalueinn.com. 98 units. $59–$79 double; $100 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV.

## MONTROSE/THE HEIGHTS

### Expensive

**La Colombe d'Or ★★** If you enjoy the smallness of scale of a B&B and the fact that the rooms don't look like hotel rooms, but you want more space, in-room dining, and more privacy, this is the hotel for you. The five suites are extremely large, with hardwood floors, area rugs, antiques, king-size beds, and large bathrooms. Some suites come with separate dining rooms, and the in-room service, from either the bar or the restaurant, is one of the things this hotel is known for. The mansion that the hotel occupies was built in the 1920s for oilman Walter Fondren. The interior has some beautiful architectural features, and its location puts you close to museums, restaurants, and the downtown area. The top floor of the original house is now an art gallery.

3410 Montrose Blvd., Houston, TX 77006. ✆ **713/524-7999.** Fax 713/524-8923. www.lacolombedor.com. 6 units. $199–$275 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free valet parking. Pets allowed with $150 deposit. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; limited laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer and iron available upon request.

### Moderate

**Lovett Inn ★** (Value) Located a block off Westheimer and 3 blocks from Montrose Boulevard, this B&B is on a quiet street right in the middle of the busy restaurant and club district of the Montrose area. The house dates from the early 1900s and was built by one of Houston's mayors. Most rooms are large (well above the usual size for B&Bs). The four rooms in the main house and two in the carriage house are attractive and well furnished with period pieces, wood floors, and area rugs, yet eschew the cuteiness that so many B&Bs feel obliged to deliver. Almost all have private balconies. There are also four town-house units around the corner (two per house), which have separate entrances and greater privacy. These are comfortable but modern. One town house has a full kitchen for the use of guests if they rent both rooms.

501 Lovett Blvd., Houston, TX 77006. ✆ **800/779-5224** or 713/522-5224. Fax 713/528-6708. www.lovettinn.com. 12 units. $115–$175 traditional doubles; $99–$130 town-house doubles. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; Wi-Fi in public areas. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in most units), hair dryer, iron.

**Modern B&B ★** There is no law that says a bed-and-breakfast must be in a period house. This one actually occupies two recently built town houses in the heart of the Montrose, and it exists because the original project fell through when Enron tanked. It's great for those who like modern architecture (exposed beams, airy spaces). It's also good for those who like baked goods, espresso coffee, and an honor bar. Rooms vary but are grouped in three categories: "mod" rooms, which are on the ground floor (with the bathroom up a flight of stairs), "standard" (one of which comes with a Jacuzzi), and "top

shelf," which are much larger than the others and have the use of a large porch. The owner, Lisa Collins, lives on the premises, is a gracious host, and keeps lots of information on things to do in town. All of these factors make this place a great alternative to staying in a hotel. Ms. Collins also rents out a few apartments as guesthouses. These vary in price, but a couple would be a real bargain for a big family.

4003 Hazard, Houston, TX 77098. ✆ **800/462-4014** or 832/279-6367. www.modernbb.com. 8 units. $100 mod; $185 standard; $200 top shelf. Rates include full breakfast. 3-night minimum stay for holidays. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Kids accepted when renting an entire house. Pets accepted with a $30/day fee. **Amenities:** Fitness room. *In room:* A/C, TV (DVD upon request), Wi-Fi, hair dryer, iron.

**Sara's Bed and Breakfast Inn** ★ For the traditional B&B experience—period decor, themed rooms, beautifully furnished common rooms—this is the place to stay. Sara's occupies a large Texas Victorian house in the Heights. From here it's easy to get to all of central Houston. The house is immaculately kept and brightly decorated. Guest rooms come with a queen-size or king-size bed and plenty of modern amenities, including flatscreen TVs and Wi-Fi. The rooms are furnished with character but aren't fussy. Some are inspired by other cities of Texas, including Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Galveston. The carriage house suite is extralarge and has a king-size and a double bed.

941 Heights Blvd., Houston, TX 77008. ✆ **800/593-1130** or 713/868-1130. Fax 713/868-3284. www.saras.com. 11 units. $99–$155 double; $125–$175 suite. Rates include hot breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. No children 11 and under. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, Wi-Fi, hair dryer, iron.



## KIRBY DISTRICT

### Very Expensive

**Renaissance Houston Hotel** ★★ The only hotel in the Greenway Plaza (though there are a few nearby), this 20-story hotel enjoys access to Greenway's office buildings through its concourse level of shops, a food court, a post office, and a movie theater. It's also connected to the Houston City Club by another walkway, and hotel guests can enjoy the use of its facilities, including indoor tennis courts, racquetball, and jogging track. The hotel's location off the Southwest Freeway means quick access to either downtown or Uptown. All standard rooms are spacious and decorated in an eclectic style that makes them a bit more interesting than your standard hotel room. Bathrooms are roomy as well and a cut above most of what you see in this price range. This hotel is completely nonsmoking.

6 Greenway Plaza E., Houston, TX 77046. ✆ **800/HOTELS-1** (468-3571) or 713/629-1200. www.renaissancehotels.com. 388 units. $249–$299 double; $350–$1,200 suite. Weekend rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $18; self-parking $14. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; outdoor heated pool; health club; sauna; concierge; complimentary shuttle; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; concierge level. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Moderate

**Four Points** This is a businessperson's hotel that's comfortable and well situated. It has easy access to the freeway, and you can get in and out quickly without having to negotiate a parking garage. The location is convenient—between downtown, the Rice University/Village area, and the Galleria. Rooms are being thoroughly remodeled and have plenty of light. The furnishings are modern and functional without looking cheap; some rooms have sofa sleepers. Improvements include plush mattresses—one king size or two doubles—and well-finished bathrooms (medium size).

2828 Southwest Fwy., Houston, TX 77098. ✆ **800/368-7764** or 713/942-2111. Fax 713/526-8709. www.fourpoints.com. 216 units. $120–$160 double. Weekend rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool (open in season); fitness room; car-rental desk; courtesy car; business center; limited room service; same-day laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## UPTOWN

### Very Expensive

**Hotel Derek ★★★** The creators of this hotel have gone to great lengths to separate it from the pack. They've even given it a persona—its namesake, Derek, a fictitious aging rock star/hotel owner. Given the premise, it would have been easy to lapse into cliché, but not so. Yes, there are some nods to the 1960s, but these are cleverly mixed with unexpected touches and the playful use of materials new and old to express a lighthearted vision of the counter culture. With the guest rooms, the designers have succeeded in creating a space that is functional for the business traveler while having the feel of a "pad" with all the accompanying informality. The decor is modern: The desk, side tables, and bathroom counter are thick glass with metal supports; the mattresses are mostly king size. The sitting area is a wonderful mohair velvet built-in stretching the width of the room. Details throughout show thoughtfulness: Instead of drawers, there are baskets (which make a lot more sense in a hotel room) and safes that are big enough to accommodate a briefcase.

2525 W. Loop South, Houston, TX 77027. ✆ **866/292-4100** or 713/961-3000. Fax 713/297-4393. www.hotelderek.com. 314 units. $290–$350 standard; $350–$400 studio; $550 and up suite. Weekend and promotional rates sometimes available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $19. Pets up to 50 lb. accepted with $50 fee. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness center w/spa treatments; concierge; courtesy car; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**InterContinental Houston ★★★** Walking into the busy lobby of this hotel, I was astonished at how quickly people were being attended to. I was most impressed by the number of staff on duty, their efficiency, the concierge's abilities, and the attention I received before anyone knew my business there. The rooms also impress, and insulated windows make them remarkably quiet. Room design inserts high-tech amenities into warm, comforting surroundings that steer clear of trendiness. Rooms are informal but make use of expensive materials, including marble, granite, and leather. Highlights include an oversize safe with outlets for recharging cellphones or computers, comfortable pillow-top beds, and well-thought-out desks with lots of workspace and multiple connection options.

2222 W. Loop South, Houston, TX 77027. ✆ **800/327-0200** or 713/627-7600. Fax 713/961-3327. www.ichoustonintro.com. 485 units. $275–$325 standard; $349 deluxe; $499 and up suite. Promotional rates and packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; 24-hr. state-of-the-art health club; spa treatments; outdoor Jacuzzi; concierge; courtesy car; business center w/24-hr. secretarial services; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning; club-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, CD player, high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**JW Marriott Hotel by the Galleria** On Westheimer, facing the Galleria, this high-rise hotel offers lots of amenities and a central location. Rooms are smaller than at the Westin hotels but are more attractive. The service and the amenities are better, too. Bathrooms are well lit and come with makeup mirrors and terry-cloth robes. The decor is a good-looking mix of modern and traditional. The hotel places a lot of emphasis on

the beds, and it shows. They are plush and comfortable; you have a choice of two doubles or one king size with a pullout sofa. Avoid guest rooms on the fifth floor, where the health club is located—a smell of chlorine sometimes infiltrates the air-conditioning. The hotel is completely nonsmoking.

5150 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77056. ✆ **800/228-9290** or 713/961-1500. Fax 713/961-5045. www.jwmarriotthouston.com. 514 units. $279–$339 double; $600 and up suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $27; self-parking $15 in garage; limited free parking in open lot. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated indoor/outdoor pool; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service/dry cleaning; concierge level. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.



**Omni Houston Hotel** ★★ Kids This hotel is an island of tranquillity in Uptown's sea of commotion. Flanking it on one side is a broad expanse of lawn with a decorative pool fed by cascading water and adorned with a small troop of black swans; on the other side is the heavily wooded Memorial Park. You'd think that you're miles from the busy Uptown malls, but you're not. In contrast to the modern exterior of this 11-story building—angular lines, bold colors, star k surfaces—the guest rooms are pictures of traditionalism, with 18th-century-style furniture and bedspreads with flounces in neoclassical patterns. The rooms are large and come with a view either of Memorial Park with downtown in the background or of the pools, the lawn, and the black swans. The Omni Kids Program, with special games and goodies for children, makes this a great choice for families.

4 Riverway, Houston, TX 77056. ✆ **888/444-6664** or 713/871-8181. Fax 713/871-8116. www.omnihouston.com. 373 units. $269–$299 double; $369 and up suite. Promotional rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $24; free outdoor self-parking. Pets of 25 lb. or under accepted for $50 fee. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; 2 large outdoor pools (1 heated); 4 lit tennis courts; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; children's programs; game room; concierge; courtesy limo; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/pay movies, CD player, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Sheraton Suites Houston Near the Galleria** The rooms at this all-suite hotel are attractive, with more character than most hotel rooms in the Galleria area. The headboards and accents are postmodern, and the granite countertops are snazzy. These suites aren't as big as those at the Doubletree Guest Suites (see below), but they are snazzier and more attractive. An easy-to-use retractable door makes the living room and bedroom usable as one large space or as two separate rooms, with the ample bathroom accessible from either. Bed options include two doubles or a king. Some rooms have sleeper sofas. On weekends, the hotel gets mainly families. The best rooms face westward away from Loop 610. There are 18 business suites that include features such as fax machines and copiers. This hotel is 2 blocks from the Galleria.

2400 W. Loop South, Houston, TX 77027. ✆ **800/325-3535** or 713/586-2444. Fax 713/586-2445. www.sheratonsuiteshouston.com. 281 suites. $309–$329 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $24; self-parking $13. Pets up to 80 lb. accepted with no fee. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small, heated outdoor pool; state-of-the-art fitness center; Jacuzzi; concierge; courtesy shuttle; business center; room service until midnight; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Westin Galleria and Westin Oaks** Overrated Similar in size, name, and appearance, these two hotels are often confused by travelers who arrive believing the destination has been reached only to find that they must yet again negotiate the mall parking lot. The Westin Oaks is on the east side of the Galleria mall (the side closest to Loop 610)

## Kids Family-Friendly Hotels

**Doubletree Guest Suites** (see below) The two-bedroom suites here are a good value, and the full kitchens and dining areas give guests flexibility with such things as breakfast and snacks and buying takeout.

**Omni Houston Hotel** (p. 176) With its Omni Kids Program, this hotel makes a special effort to keep smaller children amused. Kids receive a packet of goodies at check-in, and parents can even request a small, pretend suitcase that holds more games and such. As part of the program, the concierge can organize activities and trips for children to such places as the zoo.

and faces Westheimer Road. It's a family hotel, with no alcohol in the minibars. The Westin Galleria is attached to the west side of the Galleria and faces West Alabama Street. It targets business travelers, offering a business center and more formal dining than the Westin Oaks.

In other aspects the hotels are much alike. I find them a mix of good and bad. On the good side, they have the great location that allows you to walk from your hotel room into the shopping mall without ever having to leave the great indoors. The rooms are extra-large, the beds are comfortable, and the balconies—an uncommon feature in urban hotels—offer the best way to enjoy the view of perpetual motion below and the serene skyline above (get a north-facing room at the Westin Oaks, a south-facing room at the Westin Galleria). On the bad side, the rooms are awkwardly designed and plainly furnished. Another problem is the service: There wasn't enough staff present on my visits, and the concierge, once located, didn't inspire confidence. Having said that, I must add that all of this would be perfectly fine for a hotel in a lower price range, and that might be just what we're looking at here. I found the discounting of rates so common that I don't believe anyone pays the published rate here.

5060 W. Alabama St. and 5011 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77056. ✆ **800/WESTIN-1** (937-8461) or 713/960-8100. Fax 713/960-6553 (Westin Galleria) or 713/960-6554 (Westin Oaks). www.westin.com. 487 units in Westin Galleria, 406 units in Westin Oaks. $299 double; $519 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $22; free self-parking. **Amenities:** 1 restaurant in each hotel; 1 bar in each hotel; heated outdoor swimming pool; health club access ($11/day fee); children's program; concierge; car-rental desk; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

### Expensive

**Doubletree Guest Suites** ★ Kids This 26-story hotel, located a block west of the Galleria shopping complex, offers extralarge, plainly furnished suites, each with a fully equipped kitchen (including microwave and dishwasher) and a dining area for four people. (A grocery store is 4 blocks away, and Kenny & Ziggy's, a deli with takeout [see "Where to Dine," below], is even closer.) The bedroom includes two full-size beds or a king size; the sitting room has a sofa or two, armchairs, and a large TV. The furniture and decor are plain but comfortable and ideal for families with small children. Bathrooms are large with plenty of counter space. The hotel is well priced, gets a lot of repeat business, and is a favorite for extended stays. The service is good.

5353 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77056. ✆ **800/222-TREE** (222-8733) or 713/961-9000. Fax 713/877-8835. www.doubletreehotels.com. 335 suites. $199 1-bedroom suite; $289 2-bedroom suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $20; self-parking $11. Pets allowed for $25 deposit and $25 daily fee. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; fitness room; Jacuzzi; concierge; courtesy shuttle; business center; 24-hr. room service (limited menu after 11pm); in-room massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Drury Inn & Suites Near the Galleria** Value One of the best lodging values in this area is the Drury Inn. Rooms are midsize and comfortable, with extralong double beds for tall folk. Instead of the usual easy chair and ottoman, there's a recliner; the TV is larger than normal. King rooms are slightly larger and come with microwave and fridge. While the bathrooms are of okay size, they offer limited counter space. The hotel doesn't have a restaurant, but it offers free evening cocktails Monday through Thursday and a breakfast buffet every morning. Guests also receive an hour of free long-distance calls within the U.S. Weekend rates are about 40% lower than those posted below. Rates for other locations in Houston are lower.

Post Oak Park at W. Loop South, Houston, TX 77027. ✆ **800/378-7946** or ✆/fax 713/963-0700. www.druryhotels.com. 134 units. $159–$189 standard; $189–$209 king room; $209–$229 suite. Rates include breakfast buffet. Promotional and weekend rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets accepted with restrictions. **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor heated pool; fitness room; Jacuzzi; coin-op laundry; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.



### Moderate

**La Quinta Inn & Suites Galleria** You can tell at first glance that this inn, constructed in 1998, is a new breed of La Quinta, with a gurgling fountain in the lobby, a fitness room, and a fairly large outdoor heated pool with separate hot tub. Proximity to the shopping along Post Oak and in the Galleria seals the deal. Standard rooms are medium to large and come with two double beds; the "King Plus" room comes with a king-size bed and a recliner.

1625 W. Loop South, Houston, TX 77027. ✆ **800/687-6667** or 713/355-3440. Fax 713/355-2990. www.laquinta.com. 173 units. $155–$175 double; $165–$185 king plus; $199 suite. Weekend rates available. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; Jacuzzi; coin-op laundry; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## NEAR BUSH INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT

### Expensive

**Houston Airport Marriott ★** This hotel is right in the middle of the airport itself between terminals B and C, and it's on the airport tram line, which means no messing with taxis, shuttle buses, or rental cars. With this enviable location, the hotel gets a lot of business conferences. The revolving rooftop restaurant adds to the hotel's popularity—you'll see planes landing and taking off with a view that is pretty much the same as that of the airport's control tower. Guest rooms at the hotel are large and attractively furnished. The bathrooms are not particularly big, but the beds are comfortable, and everything else about the rooms is great. The restaurant is a lovely place for dinner, which is served from 5:30 to 10pm (open for lunch to groups only).

18700 JFK Blvd., Houston, TX 77032. ✆ **800/228-9290** or 281/443-2310. Fax 281/443-5294. www.marriott.com. 566 units. $249–$289 double; $450 suite. Weekend discounts. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; heated outdoor pool; large exercise room; Jacuzzi; limited room service; same-day laundry service; concierge level. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Moderate

**Clarion Inn** (Value) As far as airport hotels go, this one has the most extras for the buck. Rooms are large, comfortable, and well equipped, with two phone lines (including a cordless phone) with free local calls, microwave, and in-room safe. Most come with two full beds. Services include free airport shuttle and continental breakfast (even though there's no restaurant).

15615 JFK Blvd., Houston, TX 77032. ✆ **877/424-6423** or 281/987-8777. Fax 281/987-9317. 101 units. $120–$140 double. Weekend rates available. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; complimentary shuttle; same-day laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.



## 4 WHERE TO DINE

The Houston restaurant scene, like the city itself, is cosmopolitan. The primary influences come from Louisiana, Mexico, and Southeast Asia, but you can find restaurants serving just about any cuisine you can think of. What constitutes Houston's native cooking would be steaks, chili, barbecue, soul food, and Tex-Mex. For locals, the proper accompaniment for any of these would be beer or ice tea. The extralarge glass of ice tea is a cultural fixture in this town, as it is in the rest of the state. It is the perfect palate cleanser after a bite of something dense and spicy such as enchiladas in chili gravy.

### DOWNTOWN/MIDTOWN

#### Very Expensive

**17** ★★★ NEW AMERICAN In its brief history, this restaurant, located in the Alden-Houston Hotel, has seen a short procession of chefs, all of quality and originality; and the new chef, Wes Morton, is no exception. Originally from Louisiana, he has cooked in some highly regarded restaurants on both coasts and has brought bold cooking ideas to match the bold design of this small restaurant's dining room. The dinner menus are seasonal and understated. There is usually a choice of 6 to 10 main courses, including at least one kind of steak (this is a hotel restaurant in Texas) and a couple of daily specials. Try to order at least one fish dish; both of the ones I tasted were especially rewarding. But perhaps the best way to enjoy a meal here is to let the chef choose for you by selecting the six-course tasting menu with wine pairings. If you wish to sample the cuisine without spending much, go for lunch, when you can order the three-course menu for $17. The restaurant's dining room is small (reservations are a must), the furniture is comfortable, and the service is attentive.

1117 Prairie St. (In the Alden–Houston Hotel). ✆ **832/200-8888.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $20–$40; 6-course tasting menu $85 (with wine pairings $130); lunch 3-course menu $17. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–10:30am, 11am–2:30pm, and 5:30–10pm (until 11pm Fri–Sat); Sun 6:30–10:30am and 5:30–10pm.

## Houston Dining Landmark Rebuilding After Ike

**Brennan's of Houston,** 3300 Smith (✆ **713/522-9711**), caught fire just as Hurricane Ike began battering the city. It was an electrical fire, probably produced by the storm winds when they crossed some power lines and exploded a transformer. The same winds then fanned the flames and burned much of the building before the fire department could bring it under control. Three people who were in the building at the time, including a manager and his young daughter, suffered serious burns. The restaurant's upstairs is entirely gone, and the ground floor will need a complete renovation. The owner, Alex Brennan-Martin, has plans to rebuild. You can follow the reconstruction at www.brennanshouston.com.

Many in Houston miss this restaurant. It was a perennial favorite on most local "Top Restaurant" lists. Though founded in 1967 as a sister restaurant to the famous Brennan's of New Orleans, it became independent when the family divided the properties. It offered many of the same wonderful dishes that the other Brennan's is known for, including such Creole specialties as rouxless seafood gumbo and turtle soup, and, of course, bananas Foster. It also offered several dishes not found in the original. Before the fire, the various dining rooms were strikingly elegant. I don't think you could find a lovelier table in all of Houston. If Brennan's is back in operation by the time you visit Houston, you might want to look into making a reservation.

**Vic & Anthony's ★** STEAKS This is a steakhouse of the posh sort, with lots of wood, stone, and leather. These kinds of places are supposed to look substantial, and Vic & Anthony's doesn't disappoint. The rooms are establishment with a touch of drama. Once you're seated, you'll be tempted by the long list of appetizers, but before ordering, first ask yourself why you've come here. If your answer is "to eat steak," you should ignore these distractions (and perhaps the protestations of your dining companion) and go right for the 40-ounce USDA Prime porterhouse steak for two (your fellow diner will thank you later). This and the individual steaks are what this place is all about. To loosely translate Sancho Panza: "Hunger is the best condiment." And steak is always enjoyed best when you're ravenous. It's one of those deep Paleolithic pleasures.

1510 Texas Ave. ✆ **713/228-1111.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $20–$48. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 5–11pm.

### Moderate

**Mai's ★** VIETNAMESE Occupying a two-story brick building with green awnings on Milam Street in the midtown area, Mai's is the last of a half-dozen Vietnamese restaurants you'll pass in the preceding 6 blocks. In several ways it's the best choice, but it should not be thought of as having a lock on good Vietnamese food. I do appreciate, however, its dependability and the long hours it keeps because you never know when you might get a yen for a bowl of Vietnamese noodles (and they're all good). This would be a good place to try *pho,* the national dish, a soup to which you add vegetables and

aromatic herbs and lime juice. Sample the ever-popular spring and summer rolls served with *nam pla* and/or peanut sauce, and try a chicken stir-fry with chile and lemon grass. Favorites include the *nam noung* (ground pork and shrimp with thin vermicelli) and the Mekong sweet-and-sour soup (try the catfish version).

3403 Milam St. ✆ **713/520-7684.** Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses $7–$16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 10am–3am; Fri–Sat 10am–4am.

### Inexpensive

**The Breakfast Klub** (Finds) BREAKFAST/LUNCH In midtown, this is the hip place for a late breakfast or casual lunch. On the menu are such down-home offerings as biscuits and gravy; pork chops and eggs; and catfish and grits. Standard breakfasts are available, too. You place the order at the counter and then take a seat. On Saturday mornings the line goes out the door. The choice of coffees is good. The surroundings are simple, with the works of local artists on the walls and a mix of soft jazz and gospel on the stereo. For lunch, the Klub offers sandwiches and salads and an occasional special, such as crawfish fettuccine.

3711 Travis St. ✆ **713/528-8561.** Breakfast $6–$8.50; sandwiches $5–$8. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–2pm; Sat 8am–2pm.

**This Is It** SOUL FOOD If you yearn for soul food plain and simple, make your way over to this little place just southwest of downtown. Chitterlings, clove-scented yams, meatloaf, braised oxtails, and lots of greens are served cafeteria-style to all comers. Owner Craig Joseph's wall of fame, photos of celebrities who have visited the restaurant, and the work of African-American artists adorn the walls of this popular establishment. This neighborhood is part of the Fourth Ward, which includes Freedmen's town, where the newly liberated slaves built their houses shortly after the Civil War. According to local historians, it was one of the most prosperous black communities in the South.

207 W. Gray. ✆ **713/659-1608.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $7–$9. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–8pm; Sun 11am–6pm; breakfast daily 6:30–10am. West Gray is a continuation of Gray, which crosses Main St. 1 block south of the freeway overpass. The restaurant is near the intersection with Bagby.

**Treebeards** ★ (Value) CREOLE This place gets my vote for best food for your money. Others see it the same way, and this is why Treebeards restaurant on Old Market Square gets such a crowd of office workers for lunch. Beat the crowd by going late or early and you won't have to wait in line. The chicken-and-shrimp gumbo, the étouffée, and the jambalaya are all good, but I somehow always return for the red beans and rice. Food is served cafeteria-style. Look for three more downtown locations: 1117 Texas Ave. (next to Christ Church Cathedral), 1100 Louisiana (in the tunnel), and 700 Rusk, at the corner of Louisiana Street.

315 Travis St. (btw. Preston and Congress). ✆ **713/228-2622.** www.treebeards.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6–$9. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm; Fri 5–9pm.

## EAST END

### Moderate

**Kim Son** VIETNAMESE/CHINESE The menu is the most imposing part of this casual, highly regarded Vietnamese restaurant. Don't worry, though, because there are no poor choices among the 100 or so options. Enjoy finely prepared delicacies as well as the expected fare, such as terrific spring rolls and lovely noodle dishes. ( The pan-seared

## Fast Food a la Houston

When you need to find a meal that can be had quick ly and cheaply, you don't have t o suff er at the hands of the national fast-f ood chains , wher e the far e tastes the same whether y ou're in Houst on or Honolulu . A number of local chains do a good job of c ooking up fast f ood with charac ter. Her e ar e f our worth considering:

**James C oney Island Hot Dogs** star ted up in Houst on in the 1930s . I t's famous f or its Texas-style chili dogs . (M ost Houst onians c onsider hot dogs without chili as either unfulfilled pot ential or f oreign no velty.) You can also order the chili with or without beans or as a chili pie . F or hot dogs , I r ecommend the Texas chili dog . There ar e 24 locations ar ound Houst on, including downtown (815 Dallas St.), in the Kirby District (3607 Shepherd at the corner of Richmond), in the Galleria area (1600 S. Post Oak), and out along the Gulf Freeway (6955 Gulf Fwy. and 10600 Gulf Fwy.).

In 1962, the Ant one family , orig inally fr om L ebanon, opened an ex otic import grocery store on Taft Street near Allen P arkway called **Antone's.** There they introduced Houston to their now-famous po' boy (sub) sandwiches, which caught on in a big way. For lunch, you can't go wrong with one of these, which come already prepared. Get the original green label or the super red label, both

shrimp with jalapeños and onions pr oves a delightful combination.) The menu includes several vegetarian dishes. Look for the ex otic fish pool at the entrance.

2001 Jefferson. ✆ **713/222-2461.** Reservations accepted for parties of 8 or more. Main courses $8–$22. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight. L ocated in the small Chinese c ommercial center 1 block east of the Brown Convention Center and the elevated Tex. 59 Fwy.

### Inexpensive

**Loma Linda ★★** TEX-MEX I like my Tex-Mex restaurants to be homey, unpretentious places where you're not likely to run into the see-and-be-seen crowd. Of course, that was true of all Tex-Mex restaurants before the rise of the fajita, which ev entually pulled Tex-Mex into the orbit of the tr uly trendy. Loma Linda brings to mind those simpler times with its un-self-conscious decoration and furnitur e and its utter lack of anything approaching trendiness. It also has an old-time 1930s tortilla maker specially designed to make the old-fashioned puffy tor tillas that y ou always used to get when or dering chile con queso . The things to or der her e ar e, of course, the puffy chile con queso for an appetizer and the puffy beef tacos, the Texas-style enchiladas with chili gravy , and the combination dinners.

2111 Telephone Rd. ✆ **713/924-6074.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6–$10; lunch specials $5.50–$6.50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm (until 11pm on w eekends). Located 6 blocks off the Gulf Fwy. (I-45). Exit Telephone Rd. and turn north; it will be on your right.

## MONTROSE/THE HEIGHTS

### Very Expensive

**Mark's ★★★** NEW AMERICAN Mark Cox, a former chef at Tony's, has a good idea of the dir ection in which American cooking should be headed—fr esh ingredients

of which are a combination of ham, salami, cheese, pickles, and special chow-chow on fresh baked bread. Antone's locations include 2424 Dunstan (in the Village), 8110 Kirby (near Reliant Stadium), and 3823 Bellaire (at Stella Link, just west of the Medical Center). You can also find these po' boys for sale at some of the small grocery stores in town.

**Beck's Prime** is a local chain of upscale burger joints that are known for big juicy burgers and great shakes. Locations include 2902 Kirby Dr. (near Westheimer), 1001 E. Memorial Loop (in Memorial Park by the golf course), and 910 Travis (in the downtown tunnel system below Bank One Center).

**Café Express** operates under the guiding principle that fast food can be nutritious, fresh, and cooked with at least some artistry. The owner of the chain is the chef at Cafe Annie's. Specialties at Café Express include a variety of salads, lively pasta dishes, juicy roast chicken, and various sandwiches. There are several items for children, including small burgers, which are sure to please. One location is in the basement of the Fine Arts Museum (the new building); other locations include 3200 Kirby Dr. (near the Village), 1422 W. Gray (in the River Oaks Shopping Center), 650 Main St. (downtown), and 1101 Uptown Park (just off Post Oak in the Galleria area).

prepared in a manner that's new and creative while being hearty and satisfying. Mark's has a set menu that changes seasonally and a menu of daily specials. A representative sampling of dishes might include grilled shrimp on a bed of fennel, basil, and tomato with a crab risotto; bourbon-glazed pork with yams and an apple compote; roasted breast of chicken with Mississippi-style grits scented with white truffles; or lamb in a basil sauce with white-cheddar potatoes. The restaurant occupies an abandoned church on Westheimer; the main dining room is in the nave and the choir loft. Alongside the nave, the owners have built an eye-catching smaller dining room with Gothic rib vaulting.

1658 Westheimer. ✆ **713/523-3800.** www.marks1658.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$40. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm; Mon–Thurs 6–11pm; Fri–Sat 5:30pm–midnight; Sun 5–10pm.

## Expensive

**Backstreet Café ★★** NEW AMERICAN Wonderful cooking, a good selection of wines, and excellent service make this place perennially popular, especially in good weather when diners flock to the tree-shaded patio. The starters are delicious creations, especially the lobster potpie and the smoked corn crab cakes. Among the main courses, the meatloaf tower with mushroom gravy and garlic mashed potatoes warms my heart like nothing else and is a work of architectural splendor. A delicious lighter option would be the pecan-crusted chicken. Side dishes can be anything from corn pudding to fried green tomatoes. Dining areas include two upstairs rooms, one downstairs, and the patio. For dessert try the bread pudding, with macadamia nut brittle and vanilla ice cream (if you dare). Don't even try to park your car; let the valet do it.

1103 S. Shepherd. ✆ **713/521-2239.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$28. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Despite the address, the restaurant is located 1 block east of Shepherd and 2 blocks north of W. Gray and the River Oaks Shopping Center, off McDuffie St.

**Divino Restaurant & Wine Bar** ★★ NORTHERN ITALIAN Fifteen years ago such a place couldn't have existed in Houston—a neighborhood restaurant serving northern Italian and showcasing an elaborate wine list. That it has thrived is a testament not only to the cooking but also to the changing palates of Houstonians. Divino's owner is a native who has lived in Italy for years and is passionate about the cooking. The menu mixes letter-perfect traditional renditions with dishes that blend tradition with personal inspiration. It includes some southern Italian as well. Wine is a big deal here; the restaurant has its own wine newsletter and even sells by the case at good prices. (***Tip:*** If, after your meal, you feel like having something sweet and fattening, walk across the street to the Chocolate Bar and get some ice cream. This sweet shop makes some of the best ice cream—several varieties of chocolate and a white-chocolate lemon that is irresistible.)

1830 W. Alabama St. ✆ **713/807-1123.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$28. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm.

**Hugo's** ★★★ MEXICAN Chef Hugo Ortega offers excellent interior Mexican food, often with a wonderful contemporary twist. For an appetizer try the tostadas or the *sopecitos* (small, thick handmade tortillas with toppings) or the lobster tacos. Main courses include duck in a *mole poblano* (the classic dark red, bittersweet sauce of the Mexican highlands) and a chile relleno with roasted chicken smothered in a *pipián* (a spicy sauce in a base of ground roasted pumpkin seeds). In addition, there's a seasonal menu. Chef Ortega has local sources for hard-to-get fresh ingredients, which, when available, become part of the offerings. For dessert, the specialty is the homemade Mexican hot chocolate, accompanied by small *churros* (the Spanish equivalent of doughnuts). These were delicious, but so were the margaritas, which, for me, also make an excellent dessert. The dining room is large and airy with comfortable furniture. There is a high ceiling made of pressed tin, part of the original building (1935), which was once a drugstore. Sometimes the noise reverberates a bit.

1602 Westheimer Rd. (at Mandell St.). ✆ **713/524-7744.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight.

**Indika** ★★ CONTEMPORARY INDIAN The best thing about this restaurant is that the owners, who are Indian, have no interest in being "authentic," which can only hamstring an imaginative chef. The seasonal menus glory in the variety of ingredients at the disposal of the modern Western cook and offer dishes that are combinations of these, and yet are expressions of thoroughly Indian sensibilities. A simple example would be the salmon tikka, which was offered as a special. Cooked tandoori-style, it was slightly blackened and crispy around the edges while perfectly moist inside. I can't think of a better way to prepare it. Quail, portabella mushrooms, and poblano chiles also made appearances on the menu. Among the appetizers was a warmed Camembert topped with mango chutney and pistachios and served with an Indian flatbread as well as very light crabmeat samosas. Among the desserts was a chocolate and cardamom bread pudding. Everything was delicious. Consider this place for a Sunday brunch if you're in a festive mood. The restaurant is in a modern building with an airy medium-size dining room and an outdoor patio area. The bar is known for its inventive cocktails.

516 Westheimer Rd. ✆ **713/524-2170.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$28. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm and 6–10:30pm; Sat 6–10:30pm; Sun 11am–3pm.

**Shade** ★★ NEW AMERICAN A strong current of thought in cooking these days believes that everything from everywhere should be in play. Critics of this position hold that in mixing techniques and ingredients from around the globe, you lose the moorings and character of place. I'm not so sure. Unlike that found in the long-established cuisines of the world, America has less tradition to follow and has always been about innovation and borrowing from others. What I find to be more alarming is the mindless use of disparate ingredients for the sake of notoriety or simply because our modern distribution network makes it possible. Local celebrity chef Claire Smith is immune to these criticisms. Her cooking is purposeful and shows a distinctly American sensibility, and not some bowdlerized version of foreign cooking for local tastes. It is often new and inventive. And when it's not inventive, it's just plain good. The salads are fresh and well dressed, the soups are soul-satisfying, and the main courses show flash. The restaurant's decor also shows some flash—unabashedly modern, simple, and with a couple of playful references to 1960s Dada. Shade is in the Heights and is a pioneer of another sort in being the first to circumvent the neighborhood's 100-year-old code prohibiting the sale of drinks. Cheers!

250 W. 19th St. ✆ **713/863-7500.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$30. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2:30pm and 5–10pm; Sat 9am–3pm and 5–10:30pm; Sun 9am–3pm and 5–9pm.

## Moderate

**Baba Yega** Finds SANDWICHES/PASTA/VEGETARIAN Set in a small bungalow on a side street off Westheimer, Baba Yega is one of the hippest places in the Montrose. The restaurant offers several small dining areas, all agreeable, particularly the garden veranda in back. Next door is an herb shop that belongs to the owner, and, whenever possible, he cooks with his own herbs. The most popular lunch items are the sandwiches, including several vegetarian choices. For dinner, the daily specials are what most people order, which usually include at least one chicken and one fish dish. Tuesday is the Italian Special, a plate of pasta and a glass of wine.

2607 Grant St. ✆ **713/522-0042.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $10–$16; sandwiches $7–$9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

## Inexpensive

**Christian's Tailgate Grill and Bar** Finds BURGERS I include this place not only because the burgers are really good, but also because it's a very Texas sort of place—a combination neighborhood bar and burger joint. Just west of the Heights, at the northeast corner of the intersection of Washington and I-10, Christian's is set in a large shack with a cement floor and cheap furniture. Catfish po' boys and Cajun fried chicken are also on the board. Happy hour runs all day Saturday, 5 to 8pm weekdays. It has a pool table and a couple of electronic games.

7340 Washington. ✆ **713/864-9744.** Burgers $5–$8. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 10am–9pm; Sat 11am–9pm.

**La Mexicana Restaurant** ★★ MEXICAN Once a little Mexican grocery store, La Mexicana started serving tacos and gradually turned exclusively to the restaurant business. It's well known for delicious Mexican breakfasts such as *huevos a la mexicana* (eggs scrambled with onions, tomatoes, and serrano chiles) or *migas* (eggs cooked with fried tortilla strips)—both particularly good, as are their *frijoles* and the green *salsa de mesa*—and classic enchilada plates (red and green are good choices). Some dishes are *muy auténtico,* such as the *nopalitos en salsa chipotle* (cactus leaves cooked in chipotle chile sauce) or the tacos *de guisado de puerco* (pork stewed in dried chile sauce) or *de chicharrón*

*en salsa verde* (pork cracklings in tomatillo sauce; one of my favorites, but not for everyone). Other dishes are Tex-Mex standbys, such as the fajitas and the combination plates. There's a choice of dining outside or inside.

1018 Fairview St. ✆ **713/521-0963.** www.lamexicanarestaurant.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $7–$14. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm.

## KIRBY DISTRICT

### Expensive

**Churrascos** ★★ SOUTH AMERICAN/STEAKS When this restaurant opened about 15 years ago, it caught on like a house afire. The owners have since opened another restaurant, Américas (p. 189). This has thinned the crowds somewhat, and fans of this place couldn't be happier. Churrascos is simpler than Américas. The main draw is the beef tenderloin butterflied, grilled, and served with chimichurri sauce, the garlicky Argentine condiment that always accompanies steak. Also very different for the Houston dining scene are the fried plantain chips served at every table, the Argentine empanadas, the Cuban-style black-bean soup, and the Peruvian-style ceviche. Grilled vegetables come "family style" with every entree. For dessert, the restaurant is justifiably famous for its *tres leches* cake.

2055 Westheimer Rd. ✆ **713/527-8300.** www.cordua.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$28; lunch $8–$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 5–11pm.







**Goode Company Texas Seafood** SEAFOOD Jim Goode, a local restaurateur, operates a few places on or just off Kirby Drive. He does a great job with local cooking, which is why I like to steer visitors here. This restaurant is my favorite place to get catfish fried in cornmeal, executed here to a Texas T. Lighter choices include the mesquite-grilled flounder or red snapper. Texas-style seafood is a lot like Southern seafood, but with some Mexican and Southwestern influences, such as grilling with mesquite wood, and using fresh chiles, such as in the Mexican seafood cocktail known as a *campechana.* Here it's usually made with shrimp and crawfish tails (depending on what's fresh). A *campechana* sauce is tomato based, like the American version of cocktail sauce, but gently spiked with green chile instead of horseradish, providing a nice, fresh piquancy, to which a little chopped avocado and some cilantro and onion are added. Gumbo and oyster po' boys are also on the menu.

2621 Westpark Dr. ✆ **713/523-7154.** www.goodecompany.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $12–$23. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 10am–11pm.

### Moderate

**Little Pappasito's** TEX-MEX This member of the Pappas family's restaurant empire serves a quality version of Tex-Mex at slightly higher prices than the norm, with higher quality ingredients. It's well known for beef and chicken fajitas, which are grilled over a fire as they should be, and not fried on a griddle. You really can't go wrong with any of the dishes here, from the guacamole to the cheese enchiladas. The main problem here is that the restaurant is very popular and the parking lot is too small. Waiting a half-hour for a table is not uncommon. But if you go between the standard mealtimes, the place is a delight.

2536 Richmond. ✆ **713/522-5066.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $11–$24. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

## Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants

**Café Express** (see "Fast Food a la Houston," earlier in this chapter) These restaurants offer miniature burgers that kids just love, while the parents can enjoy salads, roast chicken, or a pasta.

**James Coney Island Hot Dogs** (see "Fast Food a la Houston," earlier in this chapter) What hot dog place isn't popular with kids? But most of these restaurants are decorated in bright colors that make them especially attractive to the young, and they offer kid specials.

**Lupe Tortilla** (see below) This is a great place to go when the kids don't feel like sitting still, and the parents want something more in the way of real food than what kiddie places can offer. The fajitas are excellent. When the weather is cooperating, the patio is perfect for a relaxing meal.

**Lupe Tortilla** Kids TEX-MEX Don't let the silly name draw your attention away from the important fact that this kid-friendly establishment offers the family a perfect respite from shopping or sightseeing. While the kids burn off some excess energy on the restaurant's playscape, the parents can relax at a table sipping one of the restaurant's excellent margaritas and choose from the menu's Tex-Mex offerings. Featured are superb fajitas and other grilled specialties, such as the Three-Pepper Cheese Steak or the milder Steak Lupe. There are nachos and chalupas and the like for kids, and, for the adults . . . uh, did I mention the margaritas?

2414 Southwest Fwy. ✆ **713/522-4420.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $8–$15. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–9pm; Fri–Sat 11am–10pm.

**Madras Pavilion** ★★ INDIAN VEGETARIAN The way I see it, no one does vegetarian as well as the Indians, especially those of the south. They've had centuries of practice and know what they're doing. As evidence, I would offer this restaurant—an unassuming establishment tucked into a strip center on Kirby. It's a good choice as a respite from steaks, fajitas, barbecue, and other Texas specialties. The food is mouthwatering, and there's plenty to choose from: curries, different flavored rices, delicacies such as *masala dosai* (rice flour crepes filled with a deliciously spiced mixture of potatoes and onion) with or without chutney, *paneer* (cottage cheese curds usually cooked in spinach), a full range of Indian bread, including the puffy *channa batura,* served with chickpea curry, and a spicy pizzalike dish, *uthappam.* Most of these are spicy, but there is also much to choose from that is mild. With such variety, you would do well to go midday, when you can try a bit of everything from the lunch buffet ($8 on weekdays, $10 on weekends). Service can be slow.

3910 Kirby (1 block north of the Southwest Fwy., facing a parking lot on the north side of the building). ✆ **713/521-2617.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6–$15. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–3pm and 5:30–9:30pm; Fri 11:30am–3pm and 5:30–10pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–10pm.

**Thai Bistro** ★★ THAI Houston is particularly rich in Thai restaurants. This one is in a strip center along the Southwest Freeway, practically next door to a taco joint, 100% Taquito, that I recommend below. You, the reader, might suspect that I'm being lazy for

listing two restaurants practically next door to each other, but if you go and taste the food, you'll see that I only have your best interests at heart. If you have an appetite, do yourself a favor and order the assorted appetizer platter. From there you can go in any number of directions: healthy (barbecued lemon-grass tofu or lettuce wraps), spicy (blazing noodles), classic (pad Thai), or curry (Panang). These are all favorites. Also on the menu are some Vietnamese-style vermicelli dishes, which are there through historical accident. The restaurant used to be Vietnamese, and when the present owner bought the place, the neighborhood regulars wouldn't allow him to drop these dishes from the menu.

3241 Southwest Fwy. ✆ **713/669-9375.** Main courses $10–$16; lunch $7–$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC,V. Mon–Fri 11am–3pm and 5–10pm; Sat 11am–10:30pm; Sun 11am–9pm.







**Thai Spice** ★ (Value) THAI In the Rice Village there are three commendable Thai restaurants, each with its own loyal following. Of these, Thai Spice gets the nod, mostly because the service is friendlier and the dining area is roomier, more attractive, and better furnished, but also because the food is a particularly appealing interpretation of Thai that doesn't burn out your taste buds. The lunch buffet is worthy of special note for being more complete than in most other places. The dinner menu is well laid out and doesn't try to confuse you with options by listing the same basic dish four times. The spicy shrimp soup is good, and the Summer Palace is a great spicy option for a stir-fry. There are also several mild dishes, including a wonder fully simple grilled lemon-grass chicken breast. All of the curries are worth ordering, and the pad Thai is excellent. This restaurant has another location in the Heights at 420 W. 19th St. (✆ **713/880-9992**).

5117 Kelvin (at Dunstan). ✆ **713/522-5100.** Main courses $8.50–$13; lunch buffet $9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–2:30pm (lunch buffet) and 5–10pm; Sun 11:30am–3pm and 5–9pm.

## Inexpensive

**Goode Company Texas Barbecue** BARBECUE Mr. Goode cooks up some great barbecue at this rickety joint on Kirby, 4 blocks south of the Southwest Freeway. To get great smoked flavor, he cooks with the greenest wood he can find. Especially tasty are the pork ribs and the brisket, but you can also get duck, chicken, and links. Order by the pound, the plate, or the sandwich. For dessert, the pecan pie is a must. Beer signs and country music on the jukebox set the scene.

5109 Kirby Dr. ✆ **713/522-2530.** Barbecue plates $8–$14. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

**Luling City Market** BARBECUE This is great barbecue served in a traditional setting, which for Texas barbecue joints means that any effort spent decorating appears, at least, as purely an afterthought and, at most, as the owner's misguided attempt to find a place for all the objets d'art that have been cluttering up his attic. This place follows the minimalist approach. Service is lunch-counter style. I recommend the ribs and the sausage. At night, the quiet little bar fills up with regulars with whom you can chew the fat, mostly about sports. ***Note:*** This place has no official connection to the famous City Market barbecue in the town of Luling, but you can tell that someone may have learned to cook there.

4726 Richmond Ave. ✆ **713/871-1903.** Reservations not accepted. Barbecue plates $8–$12. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–9pm; Sun noon–7pm.

**100% Taquito** MEXICAN The owner hails from Mexico City, where, more than anywhere else in Mexico, good *taquerías* (taco joints) are enshrined right up there with all that Mexicans hold dear. I count myself among the faithful, and I have tried to get

Frommer's to send me off to write the definitive guide to *taquerías,* but no such luck. Tacos in Mexico are usually served on small, soft tortillas and sprinkled with a little fresh cilantro and onion. The traditional fillings might be prepared on a grill, on a griddle, or in a stew pot. To explain a few terms: *al pastor* is pork that has been marinated in *ancho chile, guajillo chile,* annatto, and sour orange and served with a little grilled pineapple; *tinga* is pork or beef stewed in a chipotle sauce; and *barbacoa* is a simple style of Mexican barbecue. All are delicious, as are the *banderillas:* fried *taquitos* done up like the Mexican flag. Tacos are served in small orders of three. One order would be enough if you're just feeling peckish, two if you're hungry.

3245 Southwest Fwy. ✆ **713/665-2900.** Orders of 3 tacos $4–$6. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.



## UPTOWN

### Very Expensive

**Américas ★★** PAN-AMERICAN This is a different sort of place to dine. From the over-the-top decor to the menu of dishes loosely inspired by the national cuisines of the New World, there is nothing ho-hum about dining here. On my first visit, I was a bit overwhelmed, but on subsequent visits I've gotten quite comfortable with the place. When crowded, it's noisy, but the furniture is comfortable, and there are several large round booths that are fun. As with its sister restaurant, Churrascos, one of the favorites is the grilled tenderloin—always a good choice. But for something more inventive, try the *relleno,* a boneless pork loin stuffed with the *masa* of a tamal, topped with a grilled shrimp, and bathed in a butter sauce with a *hint* of habanero chile. Or perhaps the *chileno,* a broiled Chilean sea bass with sweet corn and *poblano* spoon bread.

1800 Post Oak Blvd. ✆ **713/961-1492.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$45. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 5–11pm.

**Cafe Annie ★★★** SOUTHWESTERN Singing the praises of this restaurant makes me feel like nothing more than a member of the choir. Over the past 20 years, no restaurant in Houston has received more coverage, more acclaim, and more awards than Cafe Annie. If you're looking for *the* restaurant in Houston, and especially if you're on a fat expense account, this should be your choice. Those of us who aren't so fortunate can save money by going for lunch or ordering from the bar menu. One of the restaurant's signature dishes is crabmeat tostadas, available on the dinner, lunch, and bar menus. These are wonderful compositions of fresh lump crabmeat, avocado, a little finely shredded cabbage, and a touch of piquancy. Delicious main courses include the cinnamon-roasted pheasant, the beef with *chile pasilla* sauce, or the red fish with pumpkinseed sauce. The tortilla soup is one of the perennial favorites on the menu. Everything I sampled has been delicious and different. The dining room is perfectly in character with the restaurant—nice and quiet, softly lit, with lots of dark woodwork.

1728 Post Oak Blvd. (just south of San Felipe). ✆ **713/840-1111.** www.cafe-annie.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $28–$45. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon 6:30–10pm; Tues–Fri 11:30am–2pm and 6:30–10pm; Sat 6:30–10:30pm.

### Moderate

**Kenny & Ziggy's ★** DELI This is a good place to know about if you're staying in the Uptown/Galleria area. Delis aren't common in Houston, and good ones are especially rare. This one is the real deal. It's smack-dab in the middle of Uptown (in a strip center on the northeast corner of the intersection of Westheimer and Post Oak), and it offers the convenience of takeout that you can call in, and a full-service restaurant. So, if you

have an urge for an honest pastrami on rye, you won't be disappointed. There are many sandwiches to choose from and a variety of dinners, from corned beef and cabbage to Hungarian goulash to grilled snapper. Bulk deli items (meats, cheeses, lox) are sold by the pound.

2327 Post Oak Blvd. ✆ **713/871-8883.** Sandwiches (served with 2 sides) $9–$16. Dinners $15–$18. MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–9pm; Sat–Sun 9am–9pm.

## 5 SEEING THE SIGHTS



Because Houston isn't a major tourist destination, there isn't much in the way of tourism infrastructure except for the downtown visitor center. Most of the available resources are geared toward conventions and large groups, not independent travelers. From the visitor center, there is often a visitors' tour of downtown that looks at architecture, public sculpture, the tunnel system, and the view from the observation deck from the JP Morgan Chase Tower, the tallest building in Houston.

### THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

#### Downtown

**Downtown Aquarium** (Kids) In the northwest corner of downtown, a few blocks from the visitor center, is this aquarium/restaurant/amusement park complex. The major exhibit consists of several tanks in the main building displaying different aquatic ecosystems. These are nicely done, and lots of little tanks hold highly specialized species from places like the Amazon. There are also touch tanks and an exhibit of rare white tigers. Upstairs is a seafood restaurant where you can enjoy another large aquarium while you have a bite to eat. Outside the building, the main attraction is a large shark tank, which you view from a glass tunnel while seated in a miniature train. Among the rides are a Ferris wheel and a carousel. You can buy a 1-day pass or buy separate tickets for each attraction. The main exhibit takes about an hour; the train ride takes 10 minutes, with 2 to 3 minutes inside the glass tunnel.

410 Bagby St. ✆ **713/223-3474.** www.downtownaquarium.com. Day pass $16. Daily 10am–10pm.

**Downtown Tunnel System** There are 6 miles of tunnels below Houston's downtown; most of the system is private property. Along those corridors are restaurants, shops, and businesses of all varieties. You can get a map of the tunnels from the city's visitor center.

Accessible from the visitor center in city hall and all neighboring buildings, as well as most downtown hotels. Free admission. Mon–Fri 7am–6pm.

**Heritage Society at Sam Houston Park** A couple of blocks from Houston's visitor center is this park, which serves as a repository for eight of Houston's oldest houses and buildings, moved here from their original locations. The oldest dates from before Texas's independence; it's a small, simple cabin originally built close to where NASA is today. Another house was built by a freed slave in 1870. There's a church dating from 1892. The Heritage Society restored them to their original state and furnished them with pieces from the appropriate eras. The only way to see these buildings is by guided tour, which leaves every hour on the hour from the tour office at 1100 Bagby; it takes about 45 minutes. The guides are well informed and add a lot to a visit here. The Heritage

Museum can be visited without taking the tour. It's free and features permanent exhibits on Texas history.

1100 Bagby. ✆ **713/655-1912.** www.heritagesociety.org. Tours $6 adults, $4 seniors and children 13–17, $2 children 6–12. Tues–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 1–4pm.

## East End & Beyond

**Battleship *Texas* and San Jacinto Monument & Museum ★** Kids On the San Jacinto Battleground in 1836, Texas won its independence from Mexico with a crushing surprise attack by the Texan forces, whose battle cry was "Remember the Alamo!" To commemorate that victory, civic leaders in 1936 built a towering obelisk as tall as the Washington Monument but topped with a Texas Lone Star. In the base of the monument is a small museum of Texas history with some interesting exhibits, such as one about the relatively unsung Texas hero "Deaf" Smith, and a collection of watercolors of the Mexican War painted by Sam Chamberlain. There is also a small auditorium where you can watch a 35-minute documentary of the battle. If you would like to view some of the Port of Houston as well as the rest of the land for miles around, you can take the elevator up to the observation room in the top floor of the tower, which is more than 500 feet above the ground.

Across from the monument, in roughly the same place where the Texans began their advance, is the USS *Texas.* Built in 1914, before improvements in warplane technology made these large dreadnought battleships vulnerable, she is the last of her kind. Between the wars, the navy modernized the ship with antiaircraft and torpedo defenses, but it's still surprising that it survived World War II, having fought in both the Atlantic and the Pacific theaters. When you visit, you can clamber up to its small-caliber guns or onto the navigation bridge, inspect the crew's quarters, and check out the engine room. Life onboard was no picnic—the quarters were cramped and facilities were minimal—so it's interesting to learn that this ship was considered a lucky assignment. Plan on at least an hour to see the *Texas,* and as much again for the monument.

3523 Battleground Rd. ✆ **281/479-2431.** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/sanjac. Park admission $1 adults and children 13 and over; free for children 12 and under. Battleship admission $10 adults and children 13 and over, $5 seniors, free for children 12 and under; free admission to the monument and museum; observation room $4 adults, $3.50 seniors, $3 children; movie $4.50 adults, $4 seniors, $3.50 children. Daily 9am–6pm. Take the La Porte Fwy. (Tex. 225) east from Loop 610 E. For 15 miles you will pass large refineries and tank farms. (If tears well up in your eyes and your throat muscles begin to constrict involuntarily, you'll know you're headed in the right direction.) Exit Battleground Rd. (Tex. 134) and turn left.

**Houston Ship Channel ★** For those fortunate enough not to live among the industrial areas of the Texas Gulf Coast, the landscape of refineries and their intricate tangle of pipes, their forests of cooling towers and stacks, and their fields of tanks are as exotic as the Zanzibar coast. If you find this sort of thing intriguing, you can take a free boat ride on the M/V *Sam Houston,* which tours the upper 7 miles of the deep water channel. The boat dates from the 1950s and has a lovely cabin trimmed in mahogany as well as fore and aft observation decks. I hail from Houston but rarely have the opportunity to see the ship channel up close, and I enjoyed this trip. You should probably make reservations well in advance during the summer months, when it is quite popular, though I'm told that the ship channel is best seen in cooler weather, when there is no risk of bad smells. The trip takes a total of 90 minutes, during which you will most likely see large container ships, tall grain elevators, tugs, and barges. If, after the trip, you want to see more of the channel, you can drive to the San Jacinto Battlefield, where the Battleship *Texas* is on display (see review above).

7300 Clinton Dr. at Gate 8. ✆ **713/670-2416.** www.portofhouston.com. See website for security regulations, including the prohibition of cameras. Call or visit website to make reservations, which are required. Free admission. Tues–Sun 10am and 2:30pm; no morning trips Sun or Thurs. Closed Sept and holidays. Take the Gulf Fwy. south; get on Loop 610 east, which takes you over the ship channel; exit Clint on Dr. Turn right on Clint on (look for small green signs pointing the way); after a mile, you'll come to a traffic light and a sign reading PORT GATE 8. Turn left.

**Kemah Boardwalk** (Kids) The boardwalk was damaged by Ike, and at press time was closed for repairs. It should be fully open sometime in the spring of 2009. Many visitors to Space Center Houston (see review below) will afterward go out for seafood at nearby Kemah, which is as touristy as the Houston area gets. It used to be a rustic shrimping port on Galveston Bay where you could buy some shrimp and a beer and sit by the dock on an afternoon to watch the shrimp boats come in. Most of the pier was washed away in 1984 by a hurricane, and in the 1990s it was bought by a developer who built the boardwalk, several amusement rides, restaurants, a hotel, and some touristy stores and attractions. The restaurants overlook the water; if you stroll down the boardwalk you'll pass every one. Pick the one that most appeals to you. Among the attractions is a 50,000-gallon, floor-to-ceiling aquarium housing more than 100 species of tropical fish in the Aquarium Restaurant.

Tex. 146, Kemah. ✆ **877/285-3624.** www.kemahboardwalk.com.

**The Orange Show** ★★ (Finds) (Kids) This may not be the "greatest show on earth," but it must be the quirkiest. In truth, it's not a show at all, at least not as we commonly understand the word. Rather, it's the life work of one man, former postman Jeff McKissack, who spent his last 25 years assembling a collection of found objects and building materials into an architectural collage that students of folk art call a "folk art environment." It stands in a quiet working-class neighborhood just off the Gulf Freeway, where it dares to be different. With the many flagpoles, spindles, wagon wheels, and wrought-iron birds rising up from behind its walls, it seems like an outpost for spontaneity in a wilderness of cookie-cutter ranch-style houses.

Inside, the viewer is presented with all kinds of curiosities: two small arenas, observation decks, a small museum, and lots of cheerful wrought-iron decoration and tile work. Inscriptions adorn the walls; many of these honor that best of all fruits, "The orange: a great gift to mankind." Seeing the whole thing takes less than an hour. Upon the death of Mr. McKissack, the Orange Show fell into decay until it was rescued by the Orange Show Foundation, located in the house across the street. The foundation is a center for Houston's folk-art world and the organizer of the Art Car Parade and the Art Car Ball (see "Texas Calendar of Events," in chapter 3). It is also the organizer of Eyeopener Tours (see "Organized Tours," later in this section). If you like folk art, consider purchasing their driving-tour audiocassette of Houston's other folk-art treasures. (The tape comes with a map.)

2401 Munger St. ✆ **713/926-6368.** www.orangeshow.org. Admission $1 adults, free for children 11 and under. Summer Wed–Fri 9am–1pm, Sat–Sun noon–5pm; spring and fall Sat–Sun noon–5pm. From downtown, take Gulf Fwy. Exit Telephone Rd. and make the 3rd right off the feeder road onto Munger (before you get to the Telephone Rd. intersection).

**Space Center Houston** ★★★ (Kids) Space Center Houston is the visitor center for NASA's Johnson Space Center. It's the product of the joint efforts of NASA and Disney Imagineering. Easily the most popular attraction in the Houston area, there's nothing like it anywhere else in the world. You'll find plenty of exhibits and activities to interest both adults and children, and they do a great job of introducing the visitor to different aspects

of space exploration. The center banks heavily on interactive displays and simulations on the one hand and actual access to the real thing on the other. For instance, the Feel of Space gallery simulates working in the frictionless environment of space by using an air-bearing floor (something like a giant air-hockey table). Another simulator shows what it's like to land the lunar orbiter. For a direct experience of NASA, you can take the 1½-hour tram tour that takes you to, among other places, the International Space Station Assembly Building and NASA control center. You get to see things as they happen, especially interesting if there's a shuttle mission in progress. You might also see astronauts in training. And, on top of all this, Space Center Houston has the largest IMAX in Texas. Plan on staying here 3 to 4 hours.

1601 NASA Rd. 1, Clear Lake. ✆ **281/244-2100.** www.spacecenter.org. Admission (including tours and IMAX theater) $20 adults, $19 seniors, $16 children 4–11. June–July daily 10am–7pm; Aug–May Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Parking $5. The Space Center is about 25 miles from downtown Houston. Take the Gulf Fwy. to NASA Rd. 1, turn left, and go 3 miles.

## South Main/Museum District

**Children's Museum of Houston** ★★ Kids The goal behind the Children's Museum was to create a place where children can engage the world around them on their own terms, a place that will spark their imaginations, and where they will learn the joy of discovery. It is for children up to 12 years old, but even if you're without kids in tow, you might like to take a glance at the museum's fun exterior designed by Robert Venturi in association with Jackson & Ryan Architects of Houston. It's a playful sendup of the classical museum facade and is apt clothing for this institution that blurs the distinction between museum and playhouse.

The museum's staff seems to be very much in touch with the inner child. They have developed such fun interactive exhibits as Bubble Lab and Kid-TV, which gives kids the opportunity to imitate what they see on the tube while giving them a behind-the-scenes understanding of television production. Another exhibit re-creates the Mexican Indian village of Yalalag; another, called Tot Spot, focuses on the 6-month- to 3-year-old crowd, helping build motor skills through ingenious forms of play. The museum managers bring in many visitors and special shows; inquire about what they might be planning to do during your visit. The best time to go is in the afternoons when there is less probability of school-trip crowds.

1500 Binz. ✆ **713/522-1138.** www.cmhouston.org. Admission $7 adults and children, $6 seniors, free for children under 1; free family night Thurs 5–8pm. Tues–Sat 9am–6pm (until 8pm Thurs); Sun noon–6pm. The Children's Museum is on the same street as the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (the street name changes from Bissonnet to Binz), 4 blocks to the east.

**Contemporary Arts Museum** This silver-aluminum parallelogram, located on the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet cater-cornered to the Fine Arts Museum, presents temporary exhibitions of modern art and design. It has no permanent collection; what you might find here is purely the luck of the draw. When I go to the Museum of Fine Arts (p. 194), I always stick my head into the CAM to see what 's going on because it 's right across the street and it's free.

5216 Montrose Blvd. ✆ **713/284-8250.** www.camh.org. Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm (until 9pm Thurs); Sun noon–5pm.

**Hermann Park** This park has 545 acres of land and lies just beyond the Museum District, on the west side of South Main Street. The parkland is well wooded and has an 18-hole public golf course, picnic areas, and playscapes. Near the Houston Museum of

Natural Science, which borders the park, is a garden center with beautiful rose gardens and a garden of aromatic herbs. Also in that vicinity is a Japanese garden and the Miller Outdoor Theater, which often holds free plays and musical performances.

Fannin St. at Hermann Park Dr.

**Houston Museum of Natural Science** ★★ Kids This is quite a lot more than your average natural history museum. Yes, it has everything you expect (and some you might not): dinosaur skeletons, displays of Texas wildlife, a stunning gem and mineral collection, and exhibits on early cultures of the Americas, climatology, chemistry, and oil and gas exploration. But what gets most of the buzz is the miniature rainforest environment created in the Butterfly Center. You can walk among hundreds of living butterflies as they dance about in the steamy air amid a small waterfall. As you enter, you pass through the insectzoo, which holds some fascinating and bizarre living specimens of beetles, spiders, and other bugs that you wouldn't necessarily want running around freely with you.

Also in the museum are an IMAX theater and a planetarium. The museum recently equipped the planetarium with computer-animation projectors that enhance the quality of its programs about stars, galaxies, nebulae, and other astral bodies. In years past, the directors have assembled some great temporary exhibits, so ask about any that might be open during your visit. The museum occupies a corner of the Hermann Park about 3 blocks from the Museum of Fine Arts next to the equestrian statue of Sam Houston.

1 Hermann Circle Dr. ✆ **713/639-4629.** www.hmns.org. Museum $15 adults, $9 seniors and children 3–11; Butterfly Center $8 adults, $6 seniors and children; IMAX tickets $10 adults, $8 seniors and children. Multivenue ticket packages available. General hours daily 9am–9pm; hours for Butterfly Center and IMAX can differ. Parking $5 (garage entrance on Caroline St.).

**Houston Zoological Gardens** Kids Located within Hermann Park is this 50-acre zoo featuring a gorilla habitat, rare albino reptiles, a cat facility, a large aquarium, and vampire bats. Every few years the zoo builds a new facility for a portion of its residents. The Brown Education Center, open daily from 10am to 6pm, allows visitors to interact with the animals.

1513 N. MacGregor. ✆ **713/533-6500.** www.houstonzoo.org. Admission $10 adults, $6 seniors and children 2–11. Daily 9am–7pm (Mar–Nov until 6pm).

**Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH)** ★★★ This is by far the best and biggest public art museum in Texas. It's a wonderful testament to what a lot of oil money can do, and the manner in which it evolved tells something about the development of the city's sense of aesthetics. The original museum, built in the 1920s, was pure neoclassical—the attitude was that if Houston was to have a museum, it was to look like a museum. In the '50s, Mies van der Rohe, grand architect of the International Style, was hired to build an addition. In the '70s, that addition received an addition, also designed by Mies. Both of these were bold statements of modern architecture—lots of glass and steel forming a light and airy space—but, unfortunately, not the kind of space that lends itself well for much of the museum's collection.

In the '90s, the museum's directors hired Spanish architect Rafael Moneo to design a building that would be a return to traditional galleries. It, the Audrey Jones Beck Building, is across South Main Street from the main building. (A tunnel connects the two; make a point of visiting it.) The new building aims at reconciling the boldness of modernism with the staid character of traditional design. Constructed with rich materials and

### Tips . . . But It's a Wet Heat

Hot and humid, Houston has earned the unofficial title of "Air-Conditioning Capital of the World." If you're unaccustomed to high humidity and its consequences (profuse sweating, bad-hair days), you might want to take it easy at first and work on acquiring some degree of philosophical acceptance. (I like to envision the Buddha.) One more thing: Bopping around Houston in summertime means jumping from the frying pan into the freezer (to mangle yet another saying). You'll be repeatedly going from steamy outdoors into superchilled shops, restaurants, and so on. The natives are used to it, but many visitors complain, to deaf ears, I might add.

designed on grand proportions, the building feels monumental. All the galleries on the second floor take advantage of interesting "roof lanterns," which allow Houston's plentiful natural light to enter in regulated amounts. The Beck building doubles MFAH's gallery space and allows the directors to attract first-rate traveling exhibitions. The museum's collection of more than 40,000 pieces is varied, but it is perhaps strongest in the area of Impressionist and post-Impressionist works, baroque and Renaissance art, and 19th- and 20th-century American art. There is also a fine collection of African tribal art, as well as ancient artwork from several civilizations.

Aside from the two gallery buildings, there is a large sculpture garden designed by Isamu Noguchi located across Bissonnet from the main building, and the Glassell School of Art, which can be seen just to the north of the sculpture garden. Look for a building made of a strangely reflective glass brick (another architectural pun). The museum also owns two collections of the decorative arts that are displayed in two mansions in the River Oaks area; see Bayou Bend (p. 197) and Rienzi (p. 197).

1001 Bissonnet St. ✆ **713/639-7300.** www.mfah.org. Admission $7 adults, $3.50 seniors and children 6–18; free general admission every Thurs. Tues–Wed 10am–5pm; Thurs 10am–9pm; Fri–Sat 10am–7pm; Sun 12:15–7pm.

**Museum of Health & Medical Science** ★★★ Kids We've all heard about what an amazing thing the human body is, but just how much do most of us know about its workings? This family museum will surprise most visitors with its extensive use of audio, video, holograms, and medical technology to provide a graphic view of human physiology.

Because of the Texas Medical Center, Houston has a large medical community, which has been the driving force behind the creation of this museum. With additional contributions from corporations and individual doctors, it has constructed an eye-catching interactive exhibition called the **Amazing Body Pavilion.** The exhibit is itself a metaphor for the body. Visitors enter through the mouth and proceed down the digestive tract, learning about all the organs that process our food. (Children seem to think this is pretty cool.) The exhibit covers the major organs in ways that provide lots of interaction for children, and explanatory text and monologues by little holographic figures are well written and provide info that most adults will find interesting. Of course, with so many doctors involved, you can be sure that there will be some preaching about the need for a good diet and to avoid smoking, and don't expect the museum's snack bar to offer any

junk food. But do check out the gift shop; it has an assortment of curious and intriguing items that you won't easily find elsewhere.

Seeing the exhibit takes a little more than an hour. ***One other note:*** You might want to ask at the front desk about the next scheduled organ dissection. When I was there, the organ of the month was the sheep brain; I opted to forgo the performance.

1515 Hermann Dr. ✆ **713/521-1515.** www.mhms.org. Admission $8 adults, $6 seniors, $6 children 4–17; free admission Thurs 2–5pm. Tues–Sat 9am–5pm (Mon in summer); Sun noon–5pm. The museum is 1 block south of the Children's Museum.

## Montrose

**Menil Collection ★★★** (Value) Here, on display in an unremarkable neighborhood near the University of St. Thomas, is one of the world's great private collections. Jean and Dominique de Menil arrived in Houston in the 1940s, fleeing the war in Europe. For more than 4 decades, they purchased and commissioned works of art; brought artists, architects, and academics to the city; organized groundbreaking exhibitions; and did much for Houston's art museums and for the art departments of Rice University and St. Thomas University. Their collection, especially the modern art, is vast, so much so that only a fifth of it can be exhibited in the museum at one time. The structure housing the collection was designed by Renzo Piano, who worked closely with Mrs. de Menil. It's graceful and personable and doesn't seek to impress the visitor or impose itself on the collection. In these qualities, it's the physical embodiment of Mrs. de Menil's ideas about experiencing art. When you walk into the museum, there is nothing between you and the art—no grand lobby with marble stairway, no large banners or gift shop vying for attention, no tickets to buy, no tape-recorded tours. Viewing the art becomes a direct and personal experience.

The Menil Collection is concentrated in four areas: antiquity, Byzantine and medieval, tribal art, and 20th century. This may seem an incongruous mix, but, strangely enough, it holds together. The collectors never intended to gather up the most representative of a period; they simply followed their own tastes, which were modern. And one interesting consequence of this fact (intended or not) is that, in walking through these galleries one right after another, the viewer gradually discerns a universality in some modern art that connects it all the way back to antiquity and across the boundaries of Western culture to the tribal peoples of other continents.

In addition to the main museum, four satellite buildings form a museum campus. One of these satellite buildings is the much-talked-about **Rothko Chapel,** with its 14 brooding paintings by Mark Rothko, created specifically for this installation and the last works before the artist's death. In front of the chapel stands Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk.* A block south of the Rothko Chapel is the **Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum,** which is worth seeing as much for the building that houses them (designed by François de Menil, son of Jean and Dominique) as for the frescoes themselves, which were ransomed from international art thieves. Across the street from the main museum, in a building also designed by Renzo Piano, is a permanent exhibition of the works of Cy Twombly, which, though perhaps difficult to approach, are easy to view because of the gallery's exquisite light. It lends a luminous quality to the large artworks, and just being in the place somehow livens one's spirits. Finally, **Richmond Hall,** 2 blocks south of the campus, holds an installation by minimalist neon-light artist Don Flavin.

1515 Sul Ross St. ✆ **713/525-9400.** www.menil.org. Free admission. Wed–Sun 11am–7pm.

## Kirby District

**Bayou Bend ★★** Ima Hogg was the daughter of Gov. Jim Hogg, a man who obviously had a cruel sense of humor. Miss Hogg, however, did not grow up shy and self-effacing. Long after the governor was dead, she was a power to be reckoned with in local affairs and did much to keep the chicanery in city hall to a minimum. Her mansion, Bayou Bend, was built in the 1920s by Houston's most prominent architect, John F. Staub. It holds in its 28 rooms a treasure-trove of American furniture, paintings, and decorative objects dating from Colonial times to about 1870, and is set amid 14 acres of beautifully tended gardens in a variety of styles. This is a must-see for antiques collectors and gardeners.

Part of the Museum of Fine Arts, the collection can be seen by self-guided audio tour or by guided tour, for which you must make reservations. The guided tour is preferable. It takes 90 minutes and costs the same as the audio tour. Guided tours leave every 15 minutes. You can see the gardens on your own. Bayou Bend is on the backside of River Oaks, but is unapproachable from the main entrance to the neighborhood. The only way to get there is to go down Memorial Drive, which follows the north shore of Buffalo Bayou, and then turn left onto Westcott to enter the grounds.

1 Westcott St. ✆ **713/639-7750.** www.mfah.org/bayoubend. Admission (includes audio tour) $10 adults, $8.50 seniors, $5 youths 11–18. Tues–Fri 10–11:30am and 1–2:45pm; Sat 10–11:15pm. Admission for Audio Garden Tours $3. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm. Reservations required for guided tour.

**Rienzi** In a 1950s River Oaks mansion designed by John F. Staub, the Museum of Fine Arts displays its collection of European decorative arts. Most of the collection predates 1800. Both the house and the collection were donated by the family that lived here. This museum will be of most interest to collectors of English porcelain and of no interest to children. On Sundays you can take a self-guided tour, from 1 to 4pm.

1406 Kirby Dr. ✆ **713/639-7800.** www.mfah.org/rienzi. Admission $6 adults, $4 seniors. Wed–Fri 10am–3pm; Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 1–4pm. Reservations required.

## Farther Afield

**George Ranch Historical Park** (Kids) Experience the life of four generations of a Texas family on this 400-acre outdoor museum, a working cattle ranch. Wander through a restored 1820s pioneer farm, an 1880s Victorian mansion, an 1890s cowboy encampment, and a 1930s ranch house. Savor Victorian-style tea on the porch of an 1890s mansion, or sit around the campfire with cowboys during a roundup and watch crafts demonstrations such as rope twisting. Picnic areas are provided. Plan to spend a half-day here.

10215 FM 762, Richmond. ✆ **281/343-0218.** www.georgeranch.org. Admission $9 adults, $8 seniors 62 and older, $5 children 5–15. Tues–Sat 9am–5pm. Take the Southwest Fwy. (Tex. 59 south); before getting to the town of Richmond, exit FM Hwy. 762 and go 6 miles south.

**National Museum of Funeral History** Do you give much thought to how you would like to be remembered once you've shuffled off this mortal coil? Or perhaps your thoughts just naturally drift toward things funereal? If so, then this private museum is the thing for you. Its owner, Service Corporation International, is the largest funeral company in the United States, and it has obviously been at pains to assemble the nation's largest collection of funeral memorabilia. The exhibits include a restored horse-drawn hearse, antique automobile hearses, and a 1916 Packard funeral bus. You can see memorabilia and trivia from the funerals of many famous people, including Martin Luther King, Jr., John Wayne, Elvis, Abraham Lincoln, JFK, Nixon, and many more. Other attractions include a full-size replica of King Tut's sarcophagus.

415 Barren Springs (north Houston, near airport). ✆ **281/876-3063.** www.nmfh.org. Admission $10 adults, $9 seniors and veterans, $7 children 3–11, free for children 2 and under. Mon–Fri 10am–4pm; Sat–Sun noon–4pm.

**SplashTown** (Kids) Located in Spring, Texas, about 45 minutes from downtown Houston, SplashTown is a highly popular water park with a variety of fast and slow amusements and plenty of water slides. It holds special events and live entertainment throughout the season, which is generally from midspring to early fall.

21300 I-45 at Louetts Rd., Spring, TX. ✆ **281/355-3300.** www.splashtownpark.com. $33 admission, $25 children under 48 in. Parking $10. Daily 11am–9pm during summer months. Hours vary; call or check website. Follow I-45 north toward Dallas; take exit 69-A.



## ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

Houston is kid-friendly. Easily half of the above-mentioned attractions are geared toward kids or have a large component especially suitable for them.

A tour of southeast Houston will take you to the **Orange Show,** with which young kids display an almost instinctual connection; the boat trip on the **Ship Channel;** a visit to the **Battleship *Texas;*** and the wonders of **Space Center Houston.** After that there's a visit to the boardwalk in **Kemah** or a trip to the **beach** or to **Moody Gardens** in Galveston (see "Galveston" in chapter 7).

South of downtown you have the Museum District, which includes the **Children's Museum,** the **Houston Museum of Natural Science,** and the **Museum of Health & Medical Science.** And, of course, there's **Houston Zoological Gardens,** which has a special children's zoo that explores the different ecological zones of Texas. To the north is **SplashTown,** a water park, and to the southwest is the **George Ranch Historical Park** for kids interested in cowboys and the Old West.

## ORGANIZED TOURS

If you'd like a bus tour of the city to help you get your bearings, you're out of luck. Companies such as Gray Line offer tours only to conventions and visiting groups, not the general public. There is, however, a different kind of tour that can introduce you to what makes Houston unique. If you're planning to be in Houston during the second weekend of the month, you might be able to sign up for one of the offbeat tours offered by **Eyeopener Tours.** Part of the Orange Show Foundation, in some months they put together a tour that focuses on a particularly interesting aspect of the city. Transportation by charter bus, snacks, and drinks are included in the price (usually around $60). Past tours have included folk-art sites of the city, places of worship, architectural highlights, architectural lowlights, blues centers, and ethnic markets. Most of those who participate are resident Houstonians who want to learn about an unknown part of the city. Eyeopener Tours also sells an audiocassette and map for a self-guided tour of Houston's folk-art environments. This is a good offering if you're pretty good at following directions and working with a map. For information, call ✆ **713/926-6368** or check www.orangeshow.org/eyeopener.html.

The other option is to hire a guide. You can find one through the Web page of Houston's **tour guide association** (www.ptgah.org). One of the founding members, Sandra Lord, operates a tour agency called **Discover Houston Tours** (✆ **713/222-9255;** www.discoverhoustontours.com). In addition to individual guide services, it offers some regularly scheduled walking tours of downtown and other places and the occasional special-interest tour that people can sign up for.

# 6 SPORTS & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES



## OUTDOOR FUN

**BIKING, JOGGING & WALKING** By far the most popular jogging and walking track is in **Memorial Park.** This is a large and beautiful park clothed in pine trees along Buffalo Bayou west of downtown. It's easy to reach; take Memorial Drive, which follows the north bank of Buffalo Bayou, from downtown to the park. It can be very crowded. There is a lovely hike-and-bike trail along the banks of **Buffalo Bayou** from North Shepherd to downtown. It runs along both banks of the bayou for 1.5 miles, so you can run a 3-mile loop. It offers lovely vistas of the downtown skyline and is decorated with numerous sculptures that can be both fun and interesting (and it takes you right into the Theater District). During the day it's fine, but I wouldn't advise venturing along the bayou at night. To rent a bike in this area, see **West End Bicycles** at 5427 Blossom (✆ **713/861-2271;** www.westendbikes.com). They can set you up and give you information about good rides.

A 10-mile hike-and-bike trail runs along the banks of **Brays Bayou** from Hermann Park through the Medical Center, where it goes under South Main Street and then heads southwest almost all the way to Beltway 8.

**GOLF** The easiest way to make it out onto the links is to contact **Golf Guys** (✆ **800/470-9634;** www.golfguys.net) before you come to town. These people will consult with you about the local courses, help you choose one, and reserve a tee time for no more than it would cost you to do it yourself.

Houston proper has public golf courses at most of the city's biggest parks, but with the exception of the Memorial Park Golf Course, the best public courses are outside the city. Probably the best public course (and one of the most difficult) in the area is the **Tournament Players Course at the Woodlands,** located 25 miles north of Houston in the Woodlands (✆ **281/364-6440**). Greens fees range from $95 to $125; tee times must be made at least 3 days in advance. One of the loveliest and best-regarded courses in the area is the **Longwood Golf Club** (✆ **281/373-4100;** www.longwoodgc.com), 13300 Longwood Trace in Cypress, at the northwest edge of Houston; to get there, take Tex. 290 (45 min. from downtown). Fees are $39 to $79 and include cart; tee times should be reserved 7 days in advance. Another course that a lot of people talk about is **Tour 18 Houston** (✆ **281/540-1818;** www.tour18golf.com), which copies 18 of the greatest holes in golf. The course is at 3102 FM 1960 East in Humble, about 12 miles north of Houston and about 35 minutes from downtown. Greens fees are $40 to $80; reservations can be made 30 days in advance.

In town are some municipal courses that are cheap, but somewhat tricky to get tee times for. The **Memorial Park Golf Course** (✆ **713/862-4033** or www.memorialparkgolf.com to reserve a tee time) is the most enjoyable. Greens fees are $40 to $55. **Hermann Park's golf course** (✆ **713/526-0077**) is centrally located, with greens fees ranging from $40 to $48. At both the Memorial Park and Hermann Park courses, there is an extra $15 fee for reservations more than 3 days in advance.

**TENNIS** Of course, the best strategy to get some tennis in is to stay at a hotel with courts. **Memorial Park** has some of the best of the public courses; make reservations well in advance by calling ✆ **713/867-0440.**

If you're in Houston and decide on the spur of the moment to get tickets to a game, you can call **Ticket Stop,** 5925 Kirby Dr., Ste. D (✆ **713/526-8889**), a private ticket agency. They charge extra for the tickets, so it's best to buy direct or in advance if possible.

**BASEBALL** **Houston Astros** fans enjoy the indoor/outdoor downtown stadium, Minute Maid Field. Its retractable roof is open mostly in the early part of the season before the weather gets too hot. With a little planning, tickets aren't hard to come by; call ✆ **877/9-ASTROS** (927-8767) or visit www.astros.com.

**BASKETBALL** The **Houston Rockets** (www.nba.com/rockets) play at the Toyota Center. It's downtown at 1510 Polk St., just south of the convention center and baseball park. The Rockets are a popular team, and tickets must be purchased well in advance. You can do so online or by calling ✆ **866/446-8849**.

**FOOTBALL** The **Houston Texans** play host to opponents at high-tech Reliant Stadium. It's located off South Main, not far from the Medical Center. For information and/or tickets, call ✆ **832/667-2390,** or check out www.houstontexans.com.

**GOLF TOURNAMENTS** The **Shell Houston Open** is held in late March or early April. For information and tickets, call ✆ **281/454-7000** or go to www.shellhoustonopen.com.

**RODEO** Houstonians go all-out "Western" for a couple of weeks in early March, when the **Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo** is held. Billed as the largest of all rodeos, it includes the usual events such as bull riding and calf roping, as well as performances by famous country artists. It is now held in Reliant Stadium. Call ✆ **832/667-1000,** or go to www.hlsr.com for more information. For tickets, call **Ticketmaster** at ✆ **713/629-3700.**



## 7 SHOPPING

If you're anywhere in Houston, you probably aren't far from a mall, of which there are many more than can be mentioned here. They're usually located at or near an intersection of a freeway with the Loop or Beltway 8 or other major artery. These are good for general shopping, but hold little of interest for most visitors. A different story is the outlet malls, the principal one being **Katy Mills** out at the far western boundary of Houston, in the town of Katy. Take the Katy Freeway (I-10 west) until you spot the signs; the drive is about 25 miles. This mall is a mammoth collection of about 200 factory outlet stores that offer a large selection of merchandise at discount prices. The size of the discounts varies; some are good deals. There are also restaurants and a large movie theater.

### GREAT SHOPPING AREAS

Whether you're a purposeful shopper or a last-minute accidental one, you'll need to know something about the shopping terrain of Houston. Of course, the main shopping area in Houston is Galleria/Uptown, but other areas have a diversity of offerings that might prove to be just what you're looking for.

#### Downtown

**Foley's,** the oldest of Houston's department stores, is now a **Macy's.** The original store on Main Street at Lamar, a five-story building that occupies an entire block, is still a

popular shopping destination (✆ **713/405-7035**). It carries several lines of expensive clothing and perfumes as well as some moderately priced ones. The other happy shopping ground downtown is the **Shops at Houston Center,** 1200 McKinney, across the street from the Four Seasons (✆ **713/759-1442;** www.shopsathc.com). It's a group of about 40 small stores, mostly boutiques and specialty shops.

## East End

Just the other side of the freeway from the George Brown Convention Center is a commercial **Chinatown,** where you can find all kinds of goods imported from across Asia. Furniture, foods, curios—you can browse your way through a number of little import stores, all within a 4-block area, between Dowling on the east, Chartreuse on the west, Rusk on the north, and Dallas on the south.

## Montrose/The Heights

Along Westheimer from Woodhead to Mandell, you'll find several antiques and junk shops that are perfect for the leisurely shopper who's out to find a diamond in the rough. If after browsing through these you haven't had your fill, a grouping of similar stores can be found on 19th Street in the Heights. In these dozen or so stores, merchandise is set down just about anywhere the owners can find a place for it, and dusting is a once-in-a-while practice. This is for bargain hunters. One Latin American folk-art shop called **Casa Ramírez,** 239 W. 19th St. (✆ **713/880-2420**), displays a panoramic collection of Mexican folk art from across the country. (For the more discriminating antiques stores, go to the Kirby District.) Don't ever accept the first price you're offered at these places—they almost always will lower the price.

Also along Westheimer are a number of vintage clothing stores. North of Westheimer, on West Gray where it intersects with Shepherd, a whole different sort of shopping awaits at the **River Oaks Shopping Center.** This is Houston's oldest shopping center. It's 2 blocks long and extends down both sides of West Gray in white-and-black Art Deco. It's a chic collection of galleries, boutiques, antiques shops, and specialty stores, as well as some fine restaurants and an art cinema.

## Kirby District

Kirby is more uniformly upscale than the Montrose. Where it begins by Westheimer, there are a couple of strip malls, the largest of which is **Highland Village,** 4000 Westheimer (✆ **713/850-3100**). Highland Village, like so much of the retail business in this part of town, is aimed at the upper-middle-class shopper with such stores as Williams-Sonoma and Pottery Barn and a few one-of-a-kind boutiques. From this part of Kirby Drive to where it passes the Rice Village is a section known informally as Gallery Row, with a mix of galleries, designer showrooms, and shops of antiques and special furnishings. Finally, the **Village** is a 16-block neighborhood of small shops mixed with outlets from high-dollar national retailers. A few of the small shops are survivors from simpler times that are now a bit at odds in the environment of day spas, expensive shoe stores, and famous designer boutiques. There is also a wide variety of restaurants to choose from in the Village when it's time to take a break from browsing.

## Uptown

The **Galleria,** 5075 Westheimer (✆ **713/622-0663**), occupies a long stretch of land along Westheimer and Post Oak. It has 320 stores that include big department stores such as Saks Fifth Avenue, Lord & Taylor, Neiman Marcus, and Nordstrom, and small designer retailers such as Gucci, Emporio Armani, and Dolce & Gabbana. Across

Westheimer from the Galleria is another shopping center called **Centre at Post Oak.** If you're looking for the finest in Western wear, go to **Pinto Ranch,** 1717 Post Oak Blvd. (✆ **713/333-7900;** www.pintoranch.com). This store sells high-end clothing, boots, belt buckles, hats, and saddles.

### Southwest

In southwest Houston just beyond the Loop is where the Asian bazaar meets American suburb. This fascinating area is simultaneously adventure shopping and an exploration into the brave new world of postmodern America. First, drive down **Harwin Drive** between Fondren and Gessner. You will see store after store and strip mall after strip mall selling jewelry, designer clothes, sunglasses, perfumes, furniture, luggage, and handbags. Most stores are run by Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, and Thai shopkeepers, but other cultures are represented, too. Occasionally one will get raided for selling designer knockoffs. Everything is said to be at bargain-basement rates, but buyer beware. What I like the best are the import stores where you're never sure what you'll find. Farther out, on **Bellaire Boulevard** in the middle of a large commercial Chinatown, is an all-Chinese mall, where you can get just about anything Chinese, including tapes and CDs, books, food and cooking items, of course, and wonderful knickknacks.







## 8 HOUSTON AFTER DARK

### THE PERFORMING ARTS

For fans of the performing arts, Houston is fertile ground. Few cities in the country can equal it in the quality of its resident orchestra, opera, ballet, and theater companies. In addition, there are several organizations that bring talented artists and companies here from around the country and the world, presenting everything from Broadway shows to Argentine tango groups to string quartets. Tickets aren't usually discounted for the opera, ballet, or symphony, but you should ask anyway. For information about performances, visit **www.houston-guide.com** or the websites of the various organizations listed below.

The symphony, the ballet, the opera, and the Alley Theatre (the city's largest and oldest theater company) all hold their performances in the theater district downtown. The opera and the ballet share the **Wortham Center,** 500 Texas Ave. (✆ **713/237-1439**); the symphony plays a block away at **Jones Hall,** 615 Louisiana St. (✆ **713/227-3974**); and the **Alley Theatre** is one of those rare companies that actually owns its own theater, located at 615 Texas Ave. (✆ **713/228-8421**), cater-cornered from the symphony. Also in the theater district is **Hobby Center for the Performing Arts,** 800 Bagby (✆ **713/315-2400**), which is shared by the Society for Performing Arts and Theater Under the Stars.

The **Society for the Performing Arts (SPA),** 615 Louisiana St. (box office ✆ **713/227-4772;** www.spahouston.org), is a nonprofit organization that brings to Houston distinguished dance companies, jazz bands, theater productions, and soloists. Within SPA, there's a program called the Broadway Series, which brings popular productions from Broadway and London's West End. The organization uses Jones Hall, the Wortham Center, and the Hobby Center.

Following are brief descriptions of the principal organizations; there are many more, especially independent theater companies that present several plays a year.

## Classical Music, Opera & Ballet

The **Houston Symphony** (✆ **713/224-7575;** www.houstonsymphony.org) is the city's oldest performing arts organization. Its season is from September to May, during which it holds about 100 concerts in Jones Hall. The classical series usually contains a number of newer compositions with visits by several guest conductors and soloists from around the world. There is also a pops series and a chamber music series, which often holds its performances at Rice University.

**Da Camera of Houston** (✆ **713/524-5050;** www.dacamera.com) brings classical and jazz chamber music orchestras to the city and holds concerts either at the Wortham or in the lobby of the Menil Collection. You can buy tickets from the box office at 1427 Branard St. in the Montrose area.

The nationally acclaimed **Houston Grand Opera** is the fifth-largest opera company in the United States. Known for being innovative and premiering new operas such as *Nixon in China,* its productions of classical works are brilliant visual affairs. The opera season is from October to May. For tickets and information go to the Wortham Center box office at 550 Prairie St. during regular business hours, or buy online at www.houstongrandopera.org.

The **Houston Ballet** (✆ **713/227-2787;** www.houstonballet.org) has garnered enormous critical acclaim from across the country. A lot of the credit belongs to director Ben Stevenson, who came to Houston more than 25 years ago under the condition that the company create its own school to teach dance as Stevenson believed it should be taught. This school, the Houston Ballet Academy, now supplies the company with 90% of its dancers, and its graduates dance in many other top ballet companies.The company tours a great deal but manages around 80 performances a year at the Wortham Center in Houston. You can buy tickets over the phone or at their website.

## Theater

The **Alley Theatre,** 615 Texas Ave. (✆ **713/228-8421;** www.alleytheatre.org), has won many awards for its productions. Its home holds a large theater and an arena theater, and during the year the company uses both to stage about 10 different productions, ranging from Shakespeare to Stoppard and even a musical or two. Ask about half-price tickets for sale the day of the show for weekday and Sunday performances. Pay-what-you-can days are sometimes offered, but you have to show up in person to buy the tickets. Box office hours are Monday through Saturday from 10am to 6:30pm and Sunday from noon to 6:30pm.

**Theatre Under The Stars,** 800 Bagby (✆ **713/558-8887;** www.tuts.org), specializes in musicals that it either brings to town or produces itself, averaging 200 performances annually. The organization got its name from having first worked at Miller Outdoor Theater in Hermann Park. It uses the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts.

The **Ensemble Theatre,** 3335 Main St. (✆ **713/520-0055;** www.ensemblehouston.com), is the city's largest black theater company. Founded in 1976, the Ensemble has grown from a band of strolling players into a resident professional company of 40 actors and eight directors. Their specialty is African-American and experimental theater.

# THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

Having a night on the town in Houston doesn't require a lot of planning, but pick up a copy of the *Houston Press,* the free weekly that you can find at many restaurants and shops. It provides a good rundown of what musical and comedy acts are in town, and it includes a lot of advertising from the clubs. There's also the daily paper, the *Chronicle,*

which has a well-organized entertainment section, and a pullout published on Thursdays. If you want to know what's going on in the clubs before you get to Houston, try their websites, **www.houstonpress.com** and **www.chron.com**.

In general, the most popular locations for nightspots are the following: downtown, around the theater district and Old Market Square; in the Montrose area; and south of the Galleria along Richmond Avenue (called the Richmond Strip). There are enough clubs in these places that you can move from one to another quickly and easily until you find something you like.

## Megaclubs

In the theater district in downtown Houston, a developer has converted the old convention center into a complex of restaurants, clubs, bars, and a movie theater. It's called **Bayou Place** (✆ 713/227-0957) and is located at 500 Texas Ave. It houses the **Verizon Wireless Theater,** which usually has live rock or jazz acts or comedy (✆ 713/230-1666; www.verizonwirelesstheater.com); the **Hard Rock Cafe** (✆ 713/227-1392), with some live acts on the weekends; and **Slick Willie's** (✆ 713/225-1277), a billiards club. Also, there are a few video and dance bars with canned music that are very popular with a younger crowd. The movie theater is called **Angelika Film Center and Café** (✆ 713/225-5232), which is a popular place to hang out in the evening before going clubbing or to a concert.







## Rock

One of the best venues for catching live rock acts is the old Houston institution known as **Fitzgerald's,** 2706 White Oak (✆ **713/862-3838**). It occupies an old Polish dance hall near the Heights neighborhood and gets talented local and touring bands. Look for their advertisement in the *Houston Press* to see who's playing while you're in town and to check ticket prices.

For alternative rock acts in a suitably grungy place, go to the **Engine Room** (✆ **713/654-7846**). It's in the southeast part of downtown at 1515 Pease near the intersection with La Branch. This club gets a mostly 20-something clientele, which comes to hear bands that are as far away from pop as they can get.

## Jazz

To hear some jazz, your best bet is one of two club/restaurants downtown that are fairly similar and close by each other. If you're not wild about the band at one, you can walk over to the other. The more formal and expensive one is in the old Rice Hotel and is called **Sambuca Jazz Café,** 909 Texas Ave. (✆ **713/224-5299**). It gets a dressed-up crowd and lines up some talented bands. The **Red Cat Jazz Café** is at 924 Congress (✆ **713/226-7870**), 3 blocks away. I heard a great band here playing interesting arrangements of bebop standards. Both cafes require a minimum consumption depending on the night of the week and which band is playing.

Another option is to check out some swing band music at **Scott Gertner's Skybar** (✆ **713/520-9688**) in the Montrose area. It's on the top floor of a 10-story building at the corner of Montrose and Hawthorne at 3400 Montrose Blvd. There are often guest bands playing other varieties of jazz. The club has a dance floor and a rooftop terrace with a great view.

## Blues

Try the **Big Easy Social and Pleasure Club,** 5731 Kirby Dr. (✆ **713/523-9999**), in the Rice Village. This club lines up a lot of local blues talent that is uncommonly good, as

well as touring zydeco acts. The clientele is a real mix of everything from yuppies to bikers. Admission can be anywhere between $5 and $15, depending upon the act.

## Folk & Acoustic

**Anderson Fair,** 2007 Grant (✆ **713/528-8576**), is the place to play if you're a folk singer. The club is a survivor from the 1960s, and looks every bit the product of its age. In its many years it has nurtured several folk artists who went on to become big names in folk, including Nancy Griffith. That it opens only Fridays and Saturdays only adds to its aura of counter culture. People of all ages hang out here, though there are a lot of former hippies. It's located a block off Montrose, behind the Montrose Art Supply building.

Another folk and bluegrass institution in Houston is **McGonigel's Mucky Duck** (✆ **713/528-5999**). It offers pub grub and burgers, wine and beer, and live music every night (except Sun, when it's closed). Wednesday Irish jam sessions are free, as are Mondays. The club is at 2425 Norfolk, near Kirby Drive where it intersects the Southwest Freeway.

## Country & Western

**Blanco's** (✆ **713/439-0072**) is a Texas-style honky-tonk that packs 'em in Mondays through Fridays, attracting all sorts, from River Oaks types to tool pushers. Lots of good Texas bands like to play here, so it's a good opportunity to see a well-known band in a small venue. There's a midsize dance floor. Monday through Wednesday is open-mic night, usually with one or another local band. Thursday and Friday offer live music, and the club is closed on Saturdays for private parties. It's located at 3406 W. Alabama, between Kirby Drive and Buffalo Speedway. When there's live music, the cover ranges from $5 to $15.

# THE BAR SCENE

**La Carafe,** 813 Congress (✆ **713/229-9399**), has been around for ages, and the small two-story brick building it occupies, even longer. In fact, it is the oldest commercial building in the city and sits slightly askew on a tiny lot facing Old Market Square. Its jukebox is something of a relic, too, with the most eclectic mix possible and some obscure choices. The clientele is mostly older downtowners who were here before the resurgence, office types, in-line skaters, and reporters from the *Chronicle.* For sheer character, no place can beat it.

Another bar with a unique flavor is **Marfreless,** 2006 Peden (✆ **713/528-0083**). This is the darkest bar I've ever been in. The background music is always classical, and the ambience is understated. Little alcoves here and there are considered romantic. The only trouble is finding the bar itself. It's in the River Oaks Shopping Center on West Gray. If you stand facing the River Oaks Theater, walk left and then make a right into the paking lot. Look for an unmarked door under a metal stairway.

# GAY & LESBIAN NIGHTLIFE

Most of Houston's gay nightlife centers on the Montrose area, where you'll find more than a dozen gay bars and clubs mostly along lower Westheimer Road and Pacific Street. For current news, pick up a copy of *Houston Voice.*

For a large and popular dance club, go to **Rich's,** 2401 San Jacinto (✆ **713/759-9606**), in the downtown area. Rich's gets a mixed crowd that's mostly gay men and women. It's noted for its lights and decorations and a large dance floor with a mezzanine level. It's very popular on Saturdays. For something more low-key, try **EJ's,** 2517 Ralph

(✆ **713/527-9071**), in the Montrose area. It's just north of the 2500 block of Westheimer. Gay men of all ages come for drinks and perhaps a game of pool. There's also a dance floor, and a small stage for the occasional drag show.

# 9 SIDE TRIPS TO EAST TEXAS



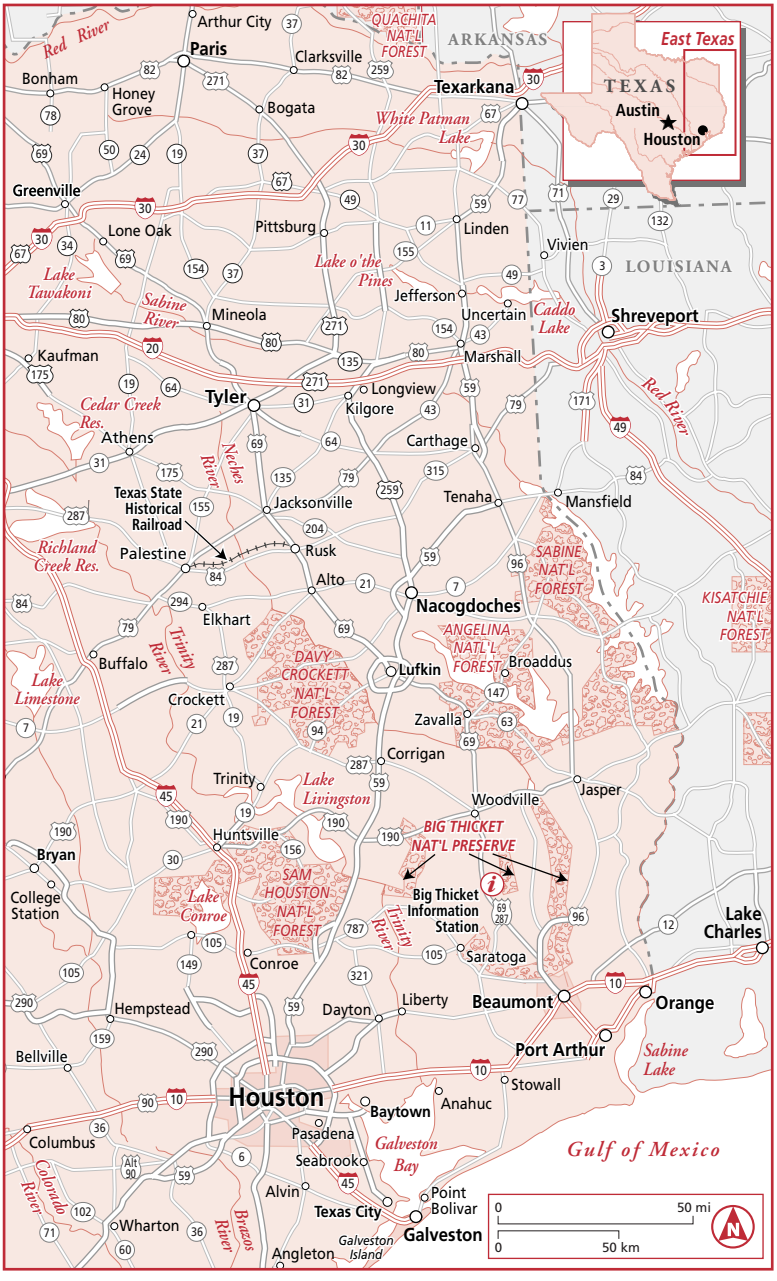
## PINEY WOODS & BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

From Beaumont (to get to Beaumont from Houston, take I-10 east toward New Orleans, and you'll arrive in **Beaumont** in 1½ hr.), if you drive north on Tex. 69, you immediately enter the forestland known in Texas as the **Piney Woods.** This is a lovely part of the state that stretches all the way north to Arkansas. Tex. 69 runs through the heart of it and is one of the most enjoyable drives in the state, especially in the fall or the early spring, which are my favorite times for visiting East Texas. Several of the following attractions can be reached by this road. The first of these is the **Big Thicket National Preserve.** The information station for the preserve (✆ **409/246-2337;** www.nps.gov/bith) is 30 miles from Beaumont, 8 miles past the town of Kountze. It will be on the right, just off the highway at the intersection of Hwy. 69 and Farm Road 420. The station is open daily from 9am to 5pm, except for Christmas and New Year's Day.

The Big Thicket is a lowland forest that occupies a land of swamps, bayous, and creeks. It's dotted with the occasional meadow, but for the most part grows so dense as to become impassable. In earlier times, it extended over 3 million acres and was an impenetrable and hostile place for early settlers. Stories abound of people getting lost in these woods and of outlaws using the place for their hide-outs. With lumbering, oil exploration, roads, and settlement, the Big Thicket has been reduced to a tenth of its original size. Of what's left, almost 100,000 acres have been preserved by acts of Congress. The preserved area is not one large expanse of land but 12 separate units, most of which follow the courses of rivers, creeks, and bayous.

The most remarkable thing about the Big Thicket is its diversity of life: The land is checkered with different ecological niches that bring together species coexisting nowhere else. It has been called the American Ark. Hickory trees and bluebirds from the Eastern forests dwell close by cactuses and roadrunners from the American Southwest and southern cypress trees and alligators from the Southern coastal marshes. The variety is astonishing. Of the five species of North American insect-eating plants, four live inside the Big Thicket.

For the visitor, the area offers opportunities for hiking, canoeing, and primitive camping. Some of the units are closed during hunting season (mid-Sept to mid-Jan) and some might be closed by flooding. You can get maps and detailed information about the hiking trails, free permits for primitive camping, and books about this fascinating area at the information station. The choice of trails here offers walks anywhere from a half-mile to 20 miles. Although leaving the designated hiking trails is permitted, you must be careful not to get lost; trailblazing in this dense brush can be slow going and painful. Canoeing in some ways has an advantage over hiking, though it limits your travel to those waterways with easy access for dropping off and picking up the canoes. At the station, you can get information about canoe outfitters who operate from the towns of Kountze and Silsbee, mostly just from late spring to early fall. For lodging and food, you'll have to rely on the establishments in one of the nearby towns; there are no such facilities in the


East Texas
TEXAS
Austin
Houston
ARKANSAS
LOUISIANA
Gulf of Mexico
Red River
Arthur City
Paris
Clarksville
QUACHITA NAT'L FOREST
Texarkana
Bonham
Honey Grove
Bogata
White Patman Lake
Greenville
Lone Oak
Pittsburg
Linden
Vivien
Lake Tawakoni
Sabine River
Lake o'the Pines
Jefferson
Uncertain
Caddo Lake
Shreveport
Mineola
Kaufman
Marshall
Tyler
Longview
Kilgore
Cedar Creek Res.
Athens
Carthage
Neches River
Texas State Historical Railroad
Jacksonville
Tenaha
Mansfield
Richland Creek Res.
Palestine
Rusk
Alto
SABINE NAT'L FOREST
Nacogdoches
KISATCHIE NAT'L FOREST
Elkhart
Trinity River
ANGELINA NAT'L FOREST
Buffalo
DAVY CROCKETT NAT'L FOREST
Lufkin
Broaddus
Lake Limestone
Crockett
Zavalla
Corrigan
Trinity
Lake Livingston
Jasper
Woodville
BIG THICKET NAT'L PRESERVE
Huntsville
Bryan
College Station
SAM HOUSTON NAT'L FOREST
Lake Conroe
Big Thicket Information Station
Trinity River
Lake Charles
Conroe
Saratoga
Hempstead
Dayton
Liberty
Beaumont
Orange
Bellville
Port Arthur
Sabine Lake
Houston
Stowall
Baytown
Anahuc
Columbus
Pasadena
Galveston Bay
Seabrook
Colorado River
Alvin
Point Bolivar
Texas City
Galveston
Wharton
Brazos River
Angleton
Galveston Island
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50 mi
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50 km
N

## Race Relations in East Texas

Travelers to East Texas might well wonder about visiting here. In the last dozen years there have been several news stories about racially motivated hate crimes. These stories provoke—but leave unanswered—questions like "Will visitors feel safe here? Will they feel welcome?" And because the news coverage focuses on the crime first and the community second, it can invoke in the reader's mind the prevailing image of the old Southern town—closed, repressive, and ready to explode, where outsiders are viewed as either meddlers or provocateurs. This isn't the case, but one can't deny that racial prejudice exists in East Texas, that there are groups of the Klan here, and that hate crimes have occurred. Given these facts, you might be surprised by what I say next—that race relations in East Texas, as they play out day-to-day, are far from seething; that they are actually open, respectful, and even cordial. I've spent time in these places and I've looked into this issue. The Klansmen may be out there, but they are isolated and marginalized. Their rallies are usually better attended by the press than by their own members. In short, civil society in East Texas is not broken and divided.

A case in point is the town of Jasper (pop. 9,000), where James Byrd, an African-American man, was brutally murdered by three whites in 1998. I was there some years ago on an assignment to interview people from all sectors of society. I went expecting to find a polarized community, but what I heard and saw convinced me that Jasper was no powder keg. Roughly half of the town's population is black, and blacks occupy several of the most powerful positions

preserve. If you're in Kountze during lunchtime on any weekday, the most interesting place to eat is at the county courthouse, where most of the locals like to show up.

## NATIONAL FORESTS

North and west of the Big Thicket, the ecological complexity gives way to pine forest habitat. Inside this large belt of pine forest are four national forests that provide opportunities for hiking, camping, boating, and fishing. These areas are a nice getaway, especially in the nonsummer months when the weather is more agreeable. They are much less visited than national parks and forests elsewhere. You can easily get to them from either Beaumont or Houston. Hwy. 69 leads directly into **Angelina National Forest,** about 50 miles north of Kountze. And the **Sam Houston National Forest** is only 55 miles north of Houston (take I-45). The other two are **Davy Crockett National Forest,** north of Sam Houston National Forest, and the **Sabine National Forest,** east of Angelina National Forest, on the Louisiana border. Each of these forests is roughly 150,000 acres, and each offers more or less the same activities: hiking, camping, boating, and fishing with such facilities as boat ramps, camping grounds, and hiking trails. For canoeing, there are a few interesting places in these forests, but it's mostly large expanses of open water, which aren't as fun as what you'll find in the Big Thicket or Caddo Lake (described below).

in the community, including the office of mayor. Their personal safety was a nonissue for them. Yes, some people were thought to be prejudiced, but they didn't consider these people dangerous, even though one of the killers did, in fact, come from the community. The black and white communities in Jasper do tend to congregate among themselves, but they also interact and share a sense of community.

In other East Texas towns, I've encountered a greater or lesser degree of separation, but always with an easy interaction. The exception to this is the all-white town of Vidor (pop. 11,000), which lies about 10 miles east of Beaumont. Vidor is infamous as a stronghold of the Klan. It has been labeled by *Texas Monthly* magazine as the most hate-filled town in Texas. In 1994, the Department of Housing and Urban Development persuaded four black families to integrate Vidor's public housing, but after being harassed, snubbed, and threatened, these families chose to move.

Integration still hasn't made it to Vidor, but it has to the rest of East Texas. Its progress, to be sure, has been uneven. Vestiges of segregation remain, especially with housing: A recent study found Beaumont and Port Arthur to have the most segregated neighborhoods of any large city in Texas. Progress has been quicker in fields such as education, employment opportunities, and access to services. Nowadays racial discrimination has retreated to more subtle manifestations (the same sort of thing you'll find elsewhere) and the infrequent but chilling acts of a small throwback group filled with hate.



When the weather is agreeable, the forests are lovely places for hiking, especially in Sam Houston National Forest or Davy Crockett, which have the majority of trails. One hiking trail in Sam Houston is 126 miles long and crosses private property in three or four places; this is a real standout for Texas, which despite its image isn't such a wide-open state. Landowners here are firm believers in barbed-wire fences and the rights of private property, but this trail makes use of the goodwill of local landowners. Fishing draws many visitors, and a lot of places rent boats and equipment and can sell a temporary fishing license ($20) in the towns that lie in or next to these national forests. Your best bet for fishing is the Angelina or Sabine forests.

For general information about a specific national forest, visit **www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/texas** or call one of the following numbers. The Sam Houston National Forest ranger offices are in the town of New Waverly (✆ 936/344-6205); Davy Crockett National Forest ranger offices are in Crockett (✆ 936/655-2299); Angelina National Forest ranger offices are in Zavalla (✆ 936/897-1068); and the Sabine National Forest ranger offices are in Hemphill (✆ 409/787-3870).

## CADDO LAKE & JEFFERSON

**Caddo Lake** and the town of **Jefferson** (pop. 2,600) share a curious history. The former owes its origin, and the latter its glory days, to an immense, naturally occurring logjam on the Red River, which was known as the "Great Raft." This logjam existed for centuries

### Kids Texas State Railroad

After passing through the Angelina National Forest, Hwy. 69 continues through Lufkin before reaching the town of Rusk, a drive of about 60 miles. Here, you can ride an old steam locomotive train 25 miles through pine forest to the town of Palestine and back again. Many railroad enthusiasts consider this to be one of the best steam train rides in the country. Passengers travel in vintage railway cars, in either first class (which has air-conditioning in summer only) or regular. The train runs on a limited schedule (usually weekends) from March to May and August, and Thursday to Sunday from June to July. The round-trip journey through pine forest takes 4 hours and costs $37 for adults and $19 for children 3 to 11 years old for general seating, and $40 for adults and $21 for children for a seat on an air-conditioned car. These rates are for the diesel train. Rates for the steam train run $4 higher. For general information and reservations, check out the website www.texasstaterr.com or call ✆ **903/683-2561** or 888/987-2461.

and stretched from 80 to 150 miles along the river, raising the water level upstream enough to form Caddo Lake and to make Big Cypress Bayou navigable by steamboat as far as Jefferson. The town became the biggest river port in Texas and the sixth-largest city. In fact, commerce was so good in Jefferson during the mid–19th century that of the Texas ports, only Galveston shipped more tonnage. But this prosperity came to an abrupt end when the Army Corps of Engineers dynamited the raft in 1873, shrinking the lake and isolating the town. The lake is back, owing to an earthen dam built by the Corps in 1914.

The town is back, too, but now its livelihood depends in large part on B&Bs and antiques stores. The return of good times to Jefferson dates from about 1961 with the restoration of the old Excelsior Hotel (now called Excelsior House) by the town's garden club. This sparked a restoration frenzy that has made Jefferson the best-restored town in East Texas. The entire central part of town is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, with a number of antebellum houses (several turned into B&Bs), churches, and commercial buildings listed. It is a pleasant place to visit and stroll about. Weekends are when the town is most lively, with several tours offered; weekdays are when you get the best lodging rates. One of the best attractions is robber baron Jay Gould's personal railroad car, the **Atalanta** ($2 guided tour): It is in great condition, has a fascinating history, and gives the visitor a wonderful idea of luxury travel in the late 19th century.

Jefferson offers better lodging than what you'll find at Caddo Lake, and when in Jefferson, the place to stay for me is the **Excelsior House** (✆ **903/665-2513;** www.theexcelsiorhouse.com) at 211 W. Austin St. It has been in continuous operation, more or less, since 1850. The 15 rooms are all furnished with antiques, many of which were here before the hotel was purchased by the garden club. Guests are invited to take a fun little tour of the hotel (nonguests $4). Room rates run from $119 to $149. You can also stay at one of the many B&Bs in town. For a list of these as well as information on tours, contact the **Marion County Chamber of Commerce** at ✆ **888/GO-RELAX** (467-3529) or 903/665-2672, or visit www.jefferson-texas.com. There are several dining

options, including **Matt's,** 109 N. Polk St. (✆ **903/665-9237**), a Tex-Mex joint, and the **Bakery Restaurant,** 201 W. Austin St. (✆ **903/665-2253**), for home cooking, both of which I recommend.

Jefferson is situated between two lakes. To the west is Lake O' the Pines, which is good for swimming and general recreation, but the real point of interest is Caddo Lake, some 10 miles to the east. It is a large lake of 26,800 acres, half of which is in Louisiana; the more interesting half is in Texas, where the lake breaks up into smaller channels removed from most of the boat traffic. The small town of **Uncertain** (pop. 300) is on the western shore of the lake. Here you can get a tour and find lodging. Near Uncertain is **Caddo Lake State Park** (✆ **903/679-3351**). Like several state parks, it has cabins for rent, which are popular and must be reserved well in advance by calling the central reservation number at ✆ **512/389-8900.** It also has campsites, which you can reserve by calling the park.

Caddo Lake is for boating or canoeing, not swimming. Instead of being an open expanse of water, it's more like a watery forest broken up into several smaller areas. Cypress trees draped in Spanish moss crowd the lake's broken shore, their roots rising from the murky water in deformed shapes. The lake also harbors abundant wildlife, including alligators, otters, water snakes, and many types of water fowl.

For a tour, you have several options. You can get a seat on an old-fashioned steamboat that runs from spring to fall. **Caddo Lake Steamboat Co.** (✆ **903/789-3978**) offers a 1-hour trip along the main water channels that costs $15 per person. It's fun, especially for kids, but for a closer look at the lake and its wildlife, try a tour on a pontoon boat (1½ hr.) that takes you beyond the main channel of the lake; contact **Caddo Grocery** in Uncertain (✆ **903/789-3495**). An even closer look can be had by contacting **Mystique Tours** (✆ **903/679-3690**), run by David J. Applebaum, a highly recommended guide. The tour takes 2 to 3 hours on a smaller boat. Your final option is to rent a canoe and paddle into the quiet parts of the lake that see few motorboats because they're too shallow and have too many roots below the surface. Try a couple of places called Carter's Lake and Clinton Lake. Talk to the rangers at the state park. They can point out on a map the canoe routes and put you in touch with the concessionaire.

# 7

# The Texas Gulf Coast

*by David Baird*

Texas's coast stretches for more than 350 miles between Louisiana and Mexico. It's predominantly flat and sandy, with large bays and skinny barrier islands tripling the amount of shoreline. The sand varies in color from white to light brown, and the water is warm and calm and usually a dull green. It can be cloudy on some days and quite clear on others, especially the farther south you go.

Though the natural features along this coast are fairly uniform, there is one notable difference: rainfall. The eastern and central parts of Texas are much wetter than South Texas. Rivers, bayous, and creeks pour into estuaries and marshy wetlands, creating a fertile habitat that supports a broad range of wildlife. Along this coast are several national wildlife refuges, the most famous being the one at Aransas, which is the winter home of the endangered whooping crane. South of Corpus Christi the land is arid, which makes the water clearer, especially on the protected side of the barrier islands. South Padre Island has more sand dunes than the barrier islands to the north, and water on its sheltered side is extrasalty because evaporation removes water faster than it is added.

In the summer of 2008, Hurricanes Dolly and Ike hit the northern and southern parts of this coast but left untouched the central coast, the area around Corpus Christi. Galveston will need time to recover from the effects of Ike, which caused changes that in some ways might be permanent. South Padre Island did not suffer as much from Dolly, and is almost fully recovered, with the exception of one or two small hotels.

There are many things for visitors to do on the Texas Gulf Coast, including all manner of watersports. Birding and eco-tourism also attract many visitors. And, thanks to its short and mild winters, the Gulf Coast attracts a lot of "winter Texans" who come fleeing the cold in their native states.

The largest cities on this coast are Corpus Christi and Galveston. Both offer the visitor a choice of recreation, lodging, and dining options. Farther south, at the very tip of the state, is the town of South Padre Island, the best-known purely tourist resort in the state. This chapter covers everything from Galveston to South Padre Island, but not the bit of coast between Galveston and Port Arthur, at the Louisiana border (and believe me, nobody considers the Port Arthur coast for its recreational activities).

## 1 GALVESTON

50 miles E of Houston

Galveston is a port city on a barrier island opposite the mainland coast from Houston. Its main attractions are the downtown historic district with its Victorian commercial buildings and houses. Parts of the town are beautifully restored and ideal for just strolling

around. The beaches are another attraction. They draw crowds of Houstonians and other Texans during the summer. The city is only an hour's drive from Houston and is a good destination for families; it's a quiet town with many points of interest, including Moody Gardens and the tall ship *Elissa,* and it's not far from NASA and Kemah. Galveston is not a boomtown like Houston. Its population of 60,000 remains fairly stable.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** The nearest commercial airports are in Houston (see chapter 6). Take the Gulf Freeway (I-45 south) from Houston. After crossing over to Galveston Island, the highway becomes a wide boulevard called Broadway.

**ORIENTATION** Broadway, Galveston's main street, doesn't cut directly across the island to the seashore; instead, it slants eastward and arrives at the seashore on the east end of the island, in front of Stewart Beach. Streets crossing Broadway are numbered; those parallel to Broadway have letters or names.

The **East End Historic District** and the old **Strand District** are north of Broadway. The Historic District is the old silk-stocking neighborhood that runs from 9th to 19th streets between Broadway and Church Street. It has many lovely houses that have been

completely restored. Three large mansions-turned-museums have regular tours (pending posthurricane renovations; see "What to See & Do," below), and the city's historical preservation society holds tours of several private houses in May (inquire at the visitor center). The Strand District is the restored commercial district that runs between 19th and 25th streets between Church Street and the harbor piers. When cotton was king, Galveston was a booming port and commercial center, and the Strand was dubbed the "Wall Street of the Southwest." What you see now are three- and four-story buildings along 6 blocks of the Strand and along some of the side streets; many of these are Victorian iron-fronts, so called because the facades included structural and decorative ironwork. This was a common building practice before the turn of the 20th century. Nowadays the Strand is a shopping and dining area that offers a wide variety of stores.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** If you're planning a trip, check the **Galveston Convention & Visitors Bureau**'s website at www.galvestoncvb.com or call ✆ **888/GAL-ISLE** (425-4753). If you're in town already, visit their information center at 2428 Seawall Blvd., close to 25th Street (✆ **409/763-4311**). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

**GETTING AROUND** Most of Galveston's hotels, motels, and restaurants are located along the sea wall from where Broadway meets the shore all the way west past 60th Street. If you're on the sea wall around 25th Street (near the visitor center), you can take the **Galveston Island Rail Trolley** (✆ **409/797-3900**) to the Strand District. The fare is $1 (in either coins or bills) from the sea wall to the Strand.



## WHAT TO SEE & DO

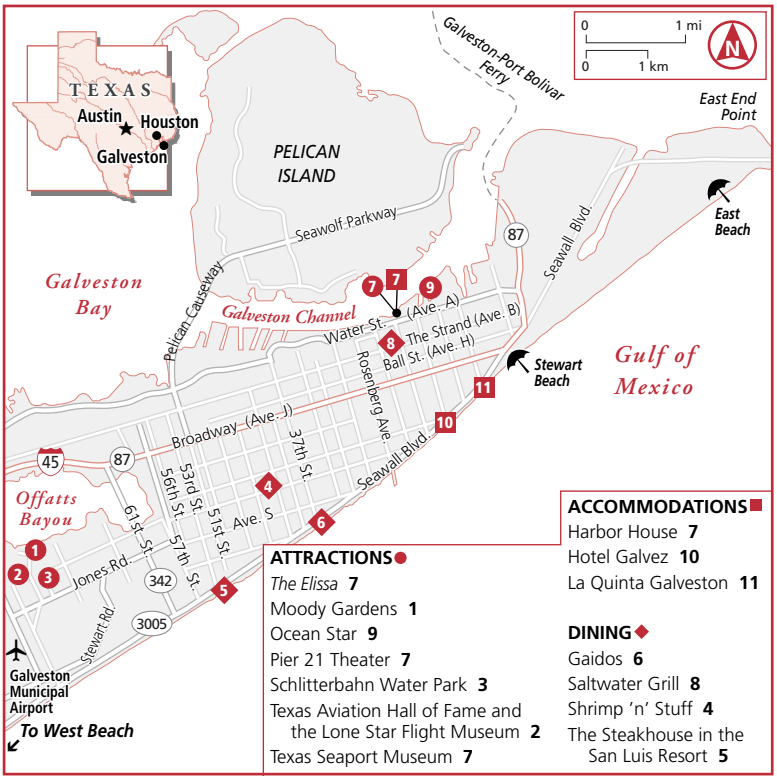
The beaches are the most popular attraction for Houstonians and other Texans who come for a day or a weekend. They are not quite as nice as those at more popular beach resorts; the sand is closer to brown than white and the water isn't transparent. But, on the other hand, they are pure sand without rocks, and the water has the nice, warm temperature of the Gulf of Mexico. **East Beach** and **Stewart Beach,** operated by the city, have pavilions with dressing rooms, showers, and restrooms, ideal for day-trippers. Stewart Beach is located at the end of Broadway, and East Beach is about a mile east of Stewart Beach. There's a $5-per-vehicle entrance fee. These beaches suffered less from Hurricane Ike than other beaches in the area, and have already been cleaned up.

Most other beaches are free. The beaches along the western shore of the island have not yet recovered. This area suffered extensive erosion, and a lot of debris, most of which came from the many beach houses in the area. Some of those closest to the water are now in the tidal zone and are the subject of legal action and will probably be condemned and removed. Most of the beach houses that are farther from the shore remain damaged and are waiting for insurance settlements to be negotiated.

Another activity popular with visitors and locals alike is to walk, skate, or ride a bike atop the sea wall, which extends 10 miles along the shoreline.

There are several tours offered in Galveston, but you need to call for availability: **Galveston Harbour Tours** (✆ 409/765-1700) is part of the Texas Seaport Museum, located on pier 21. It offers tours three to four times per day, depending on the season. **Duck Tours** (✆ 409/621-4771) offers its trademark amphibious bus tour.

On Broadway, a few massive 19th-century mansions that offered tours are now closed: **Ashton Villa,** 2328 Broadway (✆ 409/762-3933); **Moody Mansion,** 2618 Broadway (✆ 409/762-7668); and the **Bishop's Palace,** 1402 Broadway (✆ 409/762-2475). It is unclear when these will reopen. Reports mention extensive water damage and mold. The city will need to find grants to restore them.




## Museums

Except for Moody Gardens and its neighbor, the Lone Star Flight Museum (see below), all of Galveston's museums are in and around the Strand, the old commercial center. The following museums will probably be open by the summer of 2009. **Pier 21 Theater** (✆ **409/763-8808**) shows a short documentary about the 1900 storm that devastated the town, and another about a one-time Galveston resident, the pirate Jean Laffite. On the same pier is the **Texas Seaport Museum** (✆ **409/763-1877;** www.tsm-elissa.org) and the *Elissa,* a restored tall ship, which suffered little damage. Admission for both is $8 for adults, $6 for children 7 to 18, free for children 6 and under, and a family rate of $23 for up to two adults and three children. The museum also offers a boat tour of the harbor; see above.

Next door, at Pier 19, is a one-of-a-kind museum about offshore drilling rigs. You may have already noticed in the harbor the massive rigs that are often parked on the opposite shore. These rigs are tremendous feats of engineering and are some of the largest free-standing constructions ever built. They are often in the Port of Galveston being reconditioned. Most visitors have never seen one up close, but here you have an opportunity to scamper around on one: the **Ocean Star** (✆ **409/766-STAR** [766-7827]; www.oceanstaroec.com), which is an

## Hurricane Ike & Aftermath

When Hurricane Ike made landfall on Galveston in the early-morning hours of September 13, 2008, it was a high category-2 storm. This wasn't as large as other dangerous storms to hit the U.S., but two factors made Ike more destructive: First, it packed a bigger storm surge (14 ft.) than most category-2 hurricanes, and, second, it hit the Texas coast in precisely the wrong spot, in effect, outflanking Galveston's sea wall. The center of the storm swept over the eastern tip of the island into Galveston Bay. The communities on Bolivar Peninsula, just to the east of Galveston Island, bore the brunt of the destruction.

Galveston, too, suffered severe damage—much more so than when Hurricane Alicia (category 3) swept over the western half of the island in 1983. The problem is that Galveston is particularly vulnerable on its inland side. After the great storm of 1900, the land was raised so that it is highest along the sea wall and slopes downward to the bay to allow draining. When Ike's storm surge poured into Galveston Bay, there was nothing to block the water from flowing over the island's unprotected side, pushed by the counterclockwise flow of the hurricane's winds. The majority of the city was flooded, including the Strand, Galveston's popular and historic commercial center, and the East End historic district, with its many renovated houses. About 80% of houses in Galveston were flooded, including the grand mansions, such as the Bishop's Palace and Ashton Villa.

old rig that's been converted into a museum. Through a short film, scale models, actual drilling equipment, and interactive displays, every aspect of the drilling process is explored, including the many rather daunting engineering challenges. I found the film, the exhibits, and the rig itself fascinating. I imagine that those with a grasp of technical and engineering issues will enjoy this museum more than others, but anyone will appreciate the broader aspects and the sheer size of these constructions. Admission is $6 for adults, $5 for seniors, $4 for students 7 to 18, and free for kids 6 and under. Hours for this and the other museums around the Strand are roughly the same, daily from 10am to 4pm (until 5pm in summer).

**Moody Gardens** Kids Moody Gardens, an education/entertainment museum, is easily recognizable for its three large glass pyramids. It suffered relatively little damage and has already reopened. The first pyramid built was the rainforest pyramid, which holds trees, plants, birds, fish, and butterflies from several different rainforest habitats. A stroll through the building will fascinate anyone who has never been in a rainforest environment. The unusual species of Amazonian fish, birds, and butterflies are not often seen in zoos. The aquarium pyramid displays life from four of the world's oceans: penguins from Antarctica, harbor seals from the northern Pacific, and reef dwellers from the Caribbean and South Pacific. There is also a petting aquarium for those who feel compelled to touch the little darlings. The discovery pyramid displays space exploration but doesn't come close to the nearby Space Center Houston. Also of note are the two IMAX theaters: One is 3-D and the other is a Ridefilm. On top of all this, there is a pool and white-sand

Ike killed 40 people on this coast. Total damages to the island are estimated at over $10 billion, and recovery will be slow. Tourism is the lifeblood of the local economy, so some emphasis will be on getting these businesses up and running. More than 60% of the businesses in the Strand have reopened. As have a few large attractions such as Schlitterbahn water park. Replenishing the sand on beaches continues and hotel reopenings are ongoing. The annual Mardi Gras parade took place as scheduled. But basic problems with infrastructure, debris removal, and housing are all lingering. And the parts of the city that gave Galveston its character—the Strand, the old silk-stocking district, and the rest of the historic East End—are far from returning to normal. Houses and museums are shuttered, waiting for federal aid, insurance, or some other source of funding. The city has lost some of its businesses and is watching its tax base shrink. The University of Texas Medical Branch, the largest employer, has permanently laid off 3,000 employees and has reduced the number of beds in its teaching hospital. There is talk in the state capital of moving the entire institution to the mainland. If you want to visit Galveston, expect it to be a far cry from what it was, at least until the summer of 2010.



beach for children and parents and an old paddle-wheel boat that journeys out into the bay. A large hotel and spa are also on the grounds.

Just down the road at 2002 Terminal Dr. is the **Texas Aviation Hall of Fame and the Lone Star Flight Museum** (✆ **409/740-7106;** www.lsfm.org). Its two hangars, filled with aircraft in varying states of reconstruction, suffered serious damage from wind and water. It remains closed until further notice. Many of its planes are from World War II. Admission is $6 for adults, $5 for students 13 to 17, and $4 for children ages 4 to 12.

1 Hope Blvd. ✆ **800/582-4673.** w www.moodygardens.org. Admission prices vary depending on the season. You can buy a ticket to just 1 exhibit or IMAX theater, or buy a full-day pass for all exhibits and theaters that costs $40 but is sometimes cheaper during the off season. See the website for details. Summer daily 10am–9pm; rest of year Sun–Thurs 10am–6pm, Fri–Sat 10am–8pm.

**Schlitterbahn Galveston Water Park** ★ Kids This addition to Galveston's attractions comes from the central Texas town of New Braunfels, where, for the past 25 years, the Schlitterbahn water amusement park has pioneered different water rides and has been voted best water park by the Travel Channel. It has now established sister parks here in Galveston and in South Padre Island, the two biggest family destinations on the coast. This one is close by Moody Gardens. It offers a wealth of tube chutes, wave tanks, and other rides. And, unlike the other two parks, this one has a large section that can be enclosed and heated for the winter season, keeping the park open throughout the year. It did suffer damage but will be open by spring of 2009.

 2026 Lockheed. ✆ **409/770-9283.** www.schlitterbahn.com. Summer rates $34 adults (12 and older), $28 children 3–11 and seniors. Daily 10am–8pm in summer, open on weekends and holidays during the rest of the year. Check website for calendar.

## Festivals

The three most popular festivals on the island are **Mardi Gras** (Feb or Mar), the **American Institute of Architects (AIA) Sandcastle Competition** (June), and **Dickens on the Strand** (first weekend in Dec). For Mardi Gras, book a hotel room well in advance; it is a tremendously popular celebration with parades, masked balls, and a live-entertainment district around the Strand. Mardi Gras here has some advantages over New Orleans—there are fewer tourists, and it's very lively without all the public displays of drunkenness. For info, call ✆ **888/425-4753** or visit www.mardigrasgalveston.com.

The most unusual event is the annual AIA Sandcastle Competition. More than 70 architectural and engineering firms from around the state show up on East Beach and get serious about the building of sand castles and sand sculptures and take this pastime to new heights, literally. It all happens in 1 day, and the results are phenomenal. Call ✆ **713/520-0155** or check **www.aiasandcastle.com** for more information.

For its Christmas celebration Galveston hosts Dickens on the Strand, a street party for which revelers dress up in Victorian costume. The entire affair is a testament to just how much we associate traditional Christmas with the Victorian era (perhaps largely due to Dickens himself). The Strand—with its Victorian architecture and the association with its namesake—is a natural venue for such a celebration. The party includes performers, street vendors, readings of Dickens, and music. Admission is $9 in advance and $12 same-day for adults; $4 in advance for children ages 7 to 12, $6 same-day; free for children 6 and under. Those dressed in full Victorian costume are admitted free. Though Houstonians often come down for it, I'm not convinced it's worth traveling for. It's one of those things you might go to if you're already in the area. Call ✆ **409/765-7834** for more information.



## WHERE TO STAY

All the economical hotel/motel chains have properties in Galveston, with higher prices for lodgings along the sea wall. Of the big chains, **La Quinta Galveston,** 1402 Seawall Blvd. (✆ **800/531-5900**), ranks highly. Galveston also has a dozen B&Bs, most of which are in Victorian-era houses. Many of these are closed at this time. You can make inquiries through the association website: www.galvestonbedandbreakfast.com.

**Harbor House** ★ (Finds) A very different kind of hotel for Galveston, the Harbor House is built on a pier and overlooks the harbor instead of a beach. This hotel has an excellent location, near the Strand District and next to a few restaurants and museums that have taken over the neighboring piers. The architecture and exterior design are different as well. Rooms are large and well appointed in a contemporary style without a lot of clutter. Bleached wood floors, Berber carpets, and exposed wood and steel superstructure give it a feel unlike other hotels. There are nine marina slips should you come with your boat. All rooms come with fridge, microwave, and free Wi-Fi. Guests here have signing privileges at the nearby sister property on the Strand, the Tremont House.

No. 28, Pier 21, Galveston, TX 77550. ✆ **800/874-3721** or 409/763-3321. Fax 409/765-6421. www.harborhousepier21.com. 42 units. Weekdays $89–$135 double; weekends $125–$149. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Parking $10. **Amenities:** Overnight laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## The Storm

At the end of the 19th century, Galveston was a thriving port and a fast-growing city with a bright future. In fact, it was the largest city in Texas and had the third-busiest port in the country. Of course, being on the Gulf meant the risk of a hurricane, but the prevailing thought held that the shallow bottom on the western shore of the Gulf of Mexico would prevent the formation of large waves and blunt the force of any approaching storm. This assumption held sway even though a storm in 1886 completely wiped out the Texas port town of Indianola. But more evidence to the contrary came in the form of a massive storm that hit Galveston in September 1900.

It came ashore at night with a 20-foot surge that washed completely over the island. Houses were smashed into matchwood and their dwellers spilled out into the dark waters. By morning more than 6,000 islanders— one out of every six—were drowned. The city's population dropped even further when many of the survivors moved elsewhere to rebuild their lives on safer shores. Those who remained went to work to prevent a recurrence of the disaster. Galveston erected a stout sea wall that now stretches out along 10 miles of shoreline with several jetties of large granite blocks projecting out into the sea. It also filled in land under the entire city, raising it 17 feet in some places and jacking up all the surviving houses to the new level. Despite all the effort, Galveston would never regain its momentum. The memory of "the storm" proved too compelling for many of Galveston's merchants, who preferred the safety of an inland port and provided impetus for the dredging of the Houston Ship Channel, which was completed in 1914. Houston then became a boomtown, taking Galveston's place as the commercial center for the area.

**Hotel Galvez** ★ Galveston's historic grand hotel, the Galvez has been thoroughly renovated to make the guest rooms more comfortable and to correct the mistakes of previous renovations. Damages from Ike were not serious. Rooms are spacious, well furnished (most with two double beds), and conservatively decorated. The hotel overlooks the sea wall and one of the municipal beaches. It is also on the trolley line leading to the Strand district. Rates often run less than what is listed below.

2024 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550. ✆ **800/WYNDHAM** (996-3426) or 409/765-7721. Fax 409/765-5780. www.wyndham.com. 231 units. $115–$245 double. Extra person $20. Packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $9; free self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; large outdoor pool; fitness center; Jacuzzi; limited concierge; business center; limited room service; same-day laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

Seafood is what people come to Galveston for, and with all the variety offered they won't be disappointed. There are local representatives of chain restaurants such as Landry's and Joe's Crab Shack, but for the best of Galveston's seafood, try one of the places listed below. If you're craving steak, the best in town is **The Steakhouse in the San Luis Resort,** 5222 Seawall Blvd. (✆ **409/744-1500**).

**Gaidos** ★★ SEAFOOD Owned and operated by the Gaido family for four generations, this restaurant is a Galveston tradition. The Gaidos have maintained quality by staying personally involved in all the aspects of the restaurant—thus the seafood is fresh and the service attentive. The soups and side dishes are mostly traditional Southern and Gulf Coast recipes that are comfort food for the longtime customers. Main dishes include a few chicken, pork, and beef items but are mainly seafood. The stuffed snapper is the best I've had. If pompano is on the menu, it's worth considering. The steaks and pork chops are high quality and done justice in the kitchen. The menu varies seasonally. The large dining room is inviting, and a sizable bar area makes for a nice place to wait for a table.

3800 Seawall Blvd. ✆ **409/762-9625.** Reservations accepted for large parties. Main courses $15–$33; complete dinners $19–$29. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:45am–10:30pm. Closes 1–2 hours earlier during low season.

**Saltwater Grill** ★★ SEAFOOD Reopening in the spring of 2009, this restaurant prints up a menu daily that usually includes some inventive seafood pasta dishes. You might try the Gulf red snapper pan sautéed and topped with lump crabmeat, a fish dish with an Asian bent, or gumbo and/or bouillabaisse. A few nonseafood options are available as well. The preparation shows a light touch. The starters are excellent. I had asparagus spears fried in a tempura-style batter so thin as to be translucent—and they were cooked perfectly. Situated in an old building near the Strand, the dining room has a pleasant mix of past and present, formal and informal.

2017 Post Office St. ✆ **409/762-FISH** (762-3474). Reservations recommended. Main courses $14–$29. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm and 5–10pm; Sat 5–11pm; Sun 5–9pm. Free parking in rear.

**Shrimp 'n' Stuff** Value SEAFOOD This small, unassuming restaurant where you order at the counter is thought by many locals to serve the best seafood for the money. The seafood is mostly fried Southern-style and served with hush puppies. I love the fried fish and the oysters most of all. Especially popular are the oyster and the shrimp po' boys, the fried shrimp, and the seafood platter.

3901 Ave. O. ✆ **409/763-2805.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $8–$14. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 10:30am–8pm; Fri–Sat 10:30am–9pm.



## 2 BRAZOSPORT

65 miles SE of Galveston; 50 miles S of Houston; 185 miles NW of Corpus Christi

There's no town or city called Brazosport; rather, it describes southern Brazoria County and its communities. These towns, which have a combined population of about 90,000, include Clute, Freeport, Surfside Beach, Lake Jackson, Angleton, Quintana Beach, and Brazoria. They are directly south of Houston, about a 1 1/2-hour drive from downtown. This is where the Brazos River flows into the Gulf. The area is a contrasting mix of elements. The towns that aren't on the beach have a pleasant small-town atmosphere. In the fishing towns, you'll find shrimp and fishing boats docked by the water. The beach towns (like Surfside) are vacation communities with lots of beach houses owned by Houstonians. In other parts, giant petrochemical plants dominate the landscape (an especially large Dow Chemical plant lies btw. Surfside and Freeport). But the coast also has large areas of protected wetlands and a rich variety of bird species—the annual Christmas bird count in Freeport often reports more species of birds seen in a single day than at any other location in the United States.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** The nearest commercial airports are in Houston (see chapter 6). From Houston take Tex. 288 south about 45 miles to Angleton, the Brazoria County seat. Lake Jackson is another 10 miles south on Tex. 288, and Bus. 288 leads from Angleton to Clute (10 miles south). Texas highways 332 and 288 intersect in Lake Jackson, heading southeast around it and Clute, and then divide, 332 continuing southeast to Surfside Beach and 288 heading south to Freeport and Quintana. Brazoria is just west of Lake Jackson on Tex. 332.

**GETTING AROUND** The only practical way to explore this area is by car; the attractions are all within a 45-minute drive. Traffic and parking are seldom an issue. The major roads are Texas highways 288, 332, 35, and 36. Tex. 288/332 wraps around the west and south sides of Lake Jackson and Clute, where many motels are located.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Although most of the towns in the Brazosport area have their own chambers of commerce, and some have visitor centers, you can get area-wide information from the **Clute Visitors Bureau,** 1014-B Lazy Lane, Clute, TX 77531 (✆ **888/GO-CLUTE** [462-5883] or 979/265-2508; www.goclute.com); and the **Brazosport Convention & Visitors Council,** 300 Abner Jackson Pkwy., Lake Jackson, TX 77566 (✆ **888/477-2505** or 979/285-2501; www.tourtexas.com/brazosport). Both organizations operate visitor centers.

**FAST FACTS** The **Brazosport Regional Health System,** 100 Medical Dr. (just off Tex. 288), Lake Jackson (✆ **979/297-4411**), has a 24-hour emergency room. **Clute's post office,** located at 530 E. Main St., is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm, Saturday from 10am to noon. The **Lake Jackson post office,** 210 Oak Dr. S., is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 2pm.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### The Top Attractions

**Brazoria County Historical Museum** This museum, located in the 1897 Brazoria County Courthouse, will be of most interest to those curious about Texas history. A major part of the museum is dedicated to the first Anglo colony established in Texas, under the supervision of Stephen F. Austin. In the 1820s he brought 297 families into the area by way of the Brazos River and established the colony's center upstream. These original settlers became known as "the old three hundred." The large exhibit, which contains 68 panels, replicas of the era's weapons and tools, and a variety of artifacts and documents, is located in the historic courtroom on the second floor (access for visitors with disabilities is available). Most of the rest of the museum is devoted to changing exhibits that include historic subjects such as the courthouses of Texas and the Civil War's impact on the area. Allow at least 1 hour.

100 E. Cedar St., just off Bus. 288, Angleton. ✆ **979/864-1208.** www.bchm.org. Free admission (donations welcome). Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat 9am–3pm. Closed major holidays.

**The Center for the Arts & Sciences** ★ Finds This facility includes a fine natural history museum, a small planetarium, an attractive art gallery, two theaters for a variety of performing arts events, and a nature trail. You'll need at least 2 hours to see it. The **Museum of Natural Science** has a collection of more than 14,000 seashells, and is credited with instigating the movement to make the lightning whelk the official state shell of Texas. Also in its 12,000 square feet of floor space are exhibits on archaeology, fossils, dinosaurs, rocks, and minerals (including a fluorescent mineral room), and a collection

## Birding Along the Texas Coast

The coastal plains of Texas are a haven for birds. The area is rich in resident species and is the wint er home t o man y mor e. It off ers a variet y of habitats—freshwater and salt water marshes, tidal z ones, prairies, and w oodlands—and abundant f ood sour ces. It's also smack in the middle of the g reat fly way f or birds migrating from the nor thern parts of the U.S. and Canada to Central and South America. On their south ward journey this is the last chanc e f or R & R before they have to hop the Gulf of Mexico, and on the return it's the first landfall.

All of this is wh y the Texas Gulf C oast attract s lots of bir ders and sponsors several bir ding ev ents. The r eader can take f or g ranted that thr oughout this chapter ther e are plenty of bir ding oppor tunities, even when none is specifically mentioned. The best times t o visit ar e during the mig ration seasons and in winter. Most of the annual events are held in the Brazosport and the Corpus Christi areas. Here are a f ew highlights: The towns of Lake Jackson and Rock - port hold f estivals f or viewing hummingbir ds (lots of them) when they pass through here in September. Also in late September or early October local birders in C orpus hold the annual ha wk c ount at Haz el Baz emore C ounty P ark, where tens of thousands of rapt ors of various species fly thr ough here following the Nuec es River. And in April Braz osport holds its annual M igration Celebration, when local bir ders ser ve as guides on bir ding walks . F or specific information you can contact local visitor centers listed in this chapter. The state publishes three helpful maps called **"The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail,"** one for each sec tion of the Texas c oast. These list 300 viewing sit es and g ive driving dir ections and descriptions f or each. C all ✆ **888/900-2577** or check out the maps at the f ollowing w ebsite: w ww.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_trails/coastal.

of jade and iv ory carvings. The **planetarium** has a 30-foot dome and lots of high-tech projection equipment to pr oduce a v ariety of night-sky experiences. A .75-mile self-guided **nature trail** meanders thr ough bottomland along Oyster C reek adjacent to the center. The center's **art gallery** presents nine exhibits each year, ranging from local artists to national shows.

400 College Dr., Clute. ✆ **979/265-7661.** www.bcfas.org. Free admission to the museum, art gallery, and nature trail; planetarium $4 adults , $3 students . Museum and ar t galler y Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm; closed major holida ys. Planetarium sho ws Tues 7pm. Natur e trail open daily da wn–dusk. From the intersection of Texas Hwy. 332 and 288 in Lake Jackson, head east on O yster Creek Dr., through Lake Jackson and into Clute; Oyster Creek Dr. becomes College Dr. after it crosses the railroad tracks in Clut e. The center is just ahead on the lef t, adjoining the campus of Braz osport College.

**Sea Center Texas** Sea Center Texas has a 50,000-gallon aquarium wher e you'll see marine life of the Texas Gulf Coast, including Gordon, a 250-pound grouper, and sharks up to 12 feet long. There are also tanks with exhibits on other types of marine envir onments, including salt marshes, r eefs, and a coastal bay . A shallo w touch pool contains

blue crabs, hermit crabs, snails, urchins, and other marine creatures that can be handled, and just outside the visitor center is a 5-acre wetland with elevated boardwalks and signs discussing the numerous birds and other wildlife you might encounter. The facility also operates a fish hatchery producing red drum (also known as red fish—a popular sport fish). The Sea Center is a joint project of Dow Chemical and Texas Parks and Wildlife. Allow 1 hour.

300 Medical Dr., Lake Jackson. ✆ **979/299-1808.** Free admission (donations welcome). Tues–Fri 9am–4pm; Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–4pm. Closed major holidays. From Tex. 332/288 turn west onto Plantation Dr. to Medical Dr. and turn north (right), then follow the signs.

## Outdoor Activities

Birding, fishing, and hanging out on the beach are the top outdoor pursuits here.

**BIRDING/WILDLIFE VIEWING** The Brazosport area has three national wildlife refuges and many more publicly and privately held nature preserves. Of the national refuges, the most developed is the **Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge,** which covers 43,388 acres and was established to protect coastal wetlands for migratory birds and other wildlife. The Information Center, located near the entrance to the refuge, has interpretive panels on what you want to watch for, and a boardwalk outside the Information Center leads across wetlands, where you may spot an alligator. The boardwalk provides access to the .6-mile Big Slough Birding Trail. The refuge also has a 2-mile hiking and biking trail that follows an abandoned railway line and provides views across a terrain of prairie, where you might see more than a dozen species of sparrows, white-tailed hawks, and white-tailed kites. In addition, there's a 7-mile driving tour with access to several observation decks. The refuge, which also allows fishing and hunting, is open September through May daily from 8am to 4pm, and during the summer it's open the same hours the first weekend of each month and intermittently during the week. Admission is free. To get to the refuge, take FM 523 north from Freeport or south from Angleton to C.R. 227, which you follow 1 3/4 miles northeast to the refuge entrance. For additional information, contact the refuge at ✆ **409/849-7771** or visit http://southwest.fws.gov.

In the community of Quintana Beach the **Neo-Tropical Bird Sanctuary** is located on Lamar Street across from the Quintana Beach Town Hall (✆ **979/233-0848**), where you can get a bird checklist and other information. This small wooded preserve is open 24 hours a day with free admission. It's a hot spot for viewing migrant birds that follow the Brazos River to the coast.

**FISHING** This area offers excellent fishing for grouper, ling, amberjack, and red snapper—the state record 36.1-pound red snapper was caught in 1995 off the Freeport coast. Anglers can choose from about a dozen charter fishing boats, most based in Freeport Harbor, such as **Underwater Expeditions,** 1010 S. 2nd St. (✆ **979/233-1811;** www.underwaterexpeditions.com), which offers 12-hour deep-sea fishing trips at $150 per adult weekends, $125 weekdays. Longer trips and exclusive charters are available. There are numerous places for shore, beach, pier, and jetty fishing, including Quintana and Surfside beaches, and a number of public boat ramps—check with one of the visitor bureaus (see "Visitor Information," above) for locations.

**FUN ON THE BEACH** The beaches here are far from pristine; they tend to be rocky, and the sand is more brown than white. Even so, it's still fun to dig your toes into the cool sand, walk along the shore, build a sand castle, watch the freighters and shorebirds,

and look for seashells among the stones. Driving is permitted on most beaches here, except for the pedestrian-only beach at **Quintana Beach County Park,** 5th Street, in the community of Quintana (✆ **800/872-7578** or 979/233-1461; www.brazoria-county.com/parks/quintana). The park has a campground (see "Camping," below), good bird-watching, a playground, horseshoe pits, and a picnic area, and charges a $6 per vehicle day-use fee.

## WHERE TO STAY

Among the national chain motels in the Brazosport area is **La Quinta Inn,** 1126 Tex. 332 W., Clute (✆ 800/531-5900 or 979/265-7461), with spacious, attractive rooms. Other reliable chains include the **Days Inn,** 805 Tex. 332 W., Clute (✆ 800/329-7466 or 979/265-3301); **Ramada Inn,** 925 Tex. 332, Lake Jackson (✆ 800/272-6232 or 979/297-1161); and **Super 8,** 915 Tex. 332, Lake Jackson (✆ 800/800-8000 or 979/297-3031). Also see the information on **Quintana Beach County Park** under "Camping," below. Tax adds about 13% to lodging bills unless otherwise noted.

**Roses & the River** A Texas farmhouse–style home in an idyllic setting is what you'll find at Roses & the River. Sitting on almost 3½ acres along the San Bernard River, this B&B has an abundance of beautiful rosebushes. Because of the warm Gulf Coast climate, the roses bloom year-round, although they're usually best in October and November. There are sitting areas along the river plus a long veranda. Inside, the lobby/living room has a fireplace with comfortable seating, and a separate dining room where the home-made breakfasts are served. The three guest rooms, all on the second floor (no elevator), are rose themed—somewhat elegant yet cheerful and inviting. Each of the spacious rooms has a full private bathroom (one with a fantastic claw-foot spa tub), and one queen-size bed. Guest rooms have a few antiques, but furnishings are mostly contemporary. Two rooms have views of the river; the third overlooks the rose garden. Smoking is not permitted.

2434 C.R. 506, Brazoria, TX 77422. ✆ **800/610-1070** or 979/798-1070. Fax 979/798-1070. www.rosesandtheriver.com. 3 units. $150 double (tax included). Rates include full breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. Children 12 and older allowed. From Brazoria go southwest on Tex. 521, cross the San Bernard River, and take the first right turn, onto C.R. 506. After about 1½ miles, you'll find Roses & the River on the right. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD/VCR (free movies available), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, no phone.

## Camping

**Quintana Beach County Park** (on 5th St., in Quintana; ✆ **800/872-7578** or 979/233-1461) is practically on the water. The campsites are fairly close together, but it's a short walk to the beach. There are 56 sites (including 19 pull-through RV sites) and a small group of grassy "tent-only" sites. The campground has paved roads, showers, a self-serve laundry, an RV dump station, picnic tables, grills, a playground, and horseshoe pits. Boardwalks lead from the campground to the beach. Camping rates from May to September are $19 for primitive tent sites and $25 to $27 for RV sites with full hookups. From October to April, rates are $19 for tent sites and $22 to $24 for full hookups. Day use costs $6 per vehicle. There are several cabins with sleeping areas, bathrooms, and kitchens (but no linens or kitchen utensils), which rent for $135 to $160 from May to September and $120 to $145 from October to April. From Tex. 36/288 in Freeport, turn right onto FM 1495, and after crossing the Intercoastal Waterway on a swing bridge, turn left onto Quintana Road, which becomes Lamar Street in Quintana. Turn right on 8th Street, then left on Burnett Street to 5th Street.

### Finds Texas's Most Deserted Beach

Heading down the coast toward Corpus Christi, you come to Matagorda Bay, one of the least developed areas of the coast, with lots of small fishing towns and farming communities. This region has its charm, and life here is really laid-back. Protecting the coast is Matagorda Island, a 38-mile-long strip of land covering almost 44,000 acres. It's mostly federal and state land set aside as a wildlife refuge. Aside from a small state park with camping areas and a historic lighthouse, there is little development. But there are plenty of beaches, pristine and deserted, on which you will see no motorized vehicles; they are prohibited. You can swim, hike, ride a bike (if you brought one), do some bird-watching (more than 300 species of birds have been spotted here, including the whooping crane), or look for shells. Fishing is also popular. Many locals fish in the surf here.

But if you decide to visit the island, you'll have to bring your own water and food; none can be purchased on the island. Primitive campsites at the state park cost $6 per night (up to four people). An outdoor cold-water rinse is available near the boat docks. The state used to operate a passenger ferry (✆ **361/983-2215**) to the island from the town of Port O'Connor, but for the past couple of years, it's been inoperative. You might want to call and see if it's running again. Another option is to hire a boat at Port O'Connor. For more information contact **Matagorda Island State Park and Wildlife Management Area** (✆ **979/244-6804;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/matagisl/matagisl.htm).

## WHERE TO DINE

**Café Annice** ★ INTERNATIONAL This casual modern restaurant has a decidedly uptown feel and is a favorite of local businesspeople. Lunch choices include a variety of sandwiches, such as the Caesar wrap—chicken breast, romaine lettuce, carrots, red onions, plum tomatoes, and a homemade Caesar spread, wrapped in a roasted garlic and herb tortilla. Dinner entrees feature tempting selections of seafood, Angus beef, and chicken, including the excellent chicken Annice—breaded chicken topped with mushrooms, artichokes, tomatoes, and capers, sautéed with Marsala wine and served with grilled vegetable ragout and garlic mashed potatoes.

24 Circle Way, Lake Jackson. ✆ **979/292-0060.** Reservations accepted for large parties only. Main courses lunch $6–$10, dinner $10–$23. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm; Sat 11am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs 5–9pm; Fri–Sat 5–10pm. Closed major holidays. From Tex. 332/288, turn northeast onto This Way; take the first left onto Circle Way and follow it around to downtown.

**Red Snapper Inn** SEAFOOD Although the menu is primarily classic seafood such as shrimp sautéed with garlic and mushrooms, or grilled boneless flounder stuffed with crabmeat dressing, you'll also find some Greek touches such as baked shrimp with feta cheese and fresh tomatoes, and the sautéed filet of snapper in a sauce of pulverized onions, oregano, lemon juice, and olive oil. Also a good bet are the oysters *en brochette,* grilled bacon-wrapped oysters (not breaded) with meunière butter and served on rice pilaf. Nonseafood items include a charbroiled choice 14-ounce rib-eye steak, the very

 popular charbroiled Greek meatballs with spaghetti, and that Texas standard, chicken-fried steak with cream gravy.

402 Bluewater Hwy., Surfside Beach. ✆ **979/239-3226.** Reservations accepted for large parties only. Main courses $10–$17. No credit cards. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm and 5–9pm; Sat–Sun 11am–9pm. As you enter Surfside Beach on Tex. 332, you come to a traffic light; turn northeast (left) onto Bluewater Hwy. The restaurant will be on your right a few blocks down.

## 3 CORPUS CHRISTI

207 miles SW of Houston; 377 miles S of Dallas; 143 miles S of San Antonio; 691 miles SE of El Paso

The bay area around Corpus Christi offers visitors the greatest variety of activities of any place along the Texas Gulf Coast. This and the following three sections cover the major destinations in the bay area. These destinations are only about 45 minutes from one another at most, so you can hop around pretty easily. Whether you stay in Corpus, Port Aransas, or Rockport, you'll find great lodging, fantastic food, and lots to do.

Corpus Christi is a major deepwater seaport, with a population of just under 300,000, but it has the feel of a much smaller place. The downtown is easy to enjoy, and everything is pretty close together. The two biggest attractions are the State Aquarium and the USS *Lexington* aircraft carrier, which are right next to each other on the bay just north of downtown, across Harbor Bridge.



### ESSENTIALS

#### Getting There

**BY PLANE** The **Corpus Christi International Airport,** located within the city limits on the south side of Tex. 44, west of Padre Island Drive/Tex. 358 (✆ 361/289-0171), is served by **American Eagle** (✆ 800/433-7300); **Atlantic Southeast/Delta** (✆ 800/221-1212); **Continental/Continental Express** (✆ 800/523-3273); and **Southwest** (✆ 800/435-9792). All the major car-rental agencies can be found here.

**BY CAR** Tex. 35 follows the Gulf Coast—albeit slightly inland—from the Houston and Galveston area to Corpus Christi. From San Antonio, follow I-37 southeast to Corpus Christi. Before you see the town, you'll pass the city's oil refining complex.

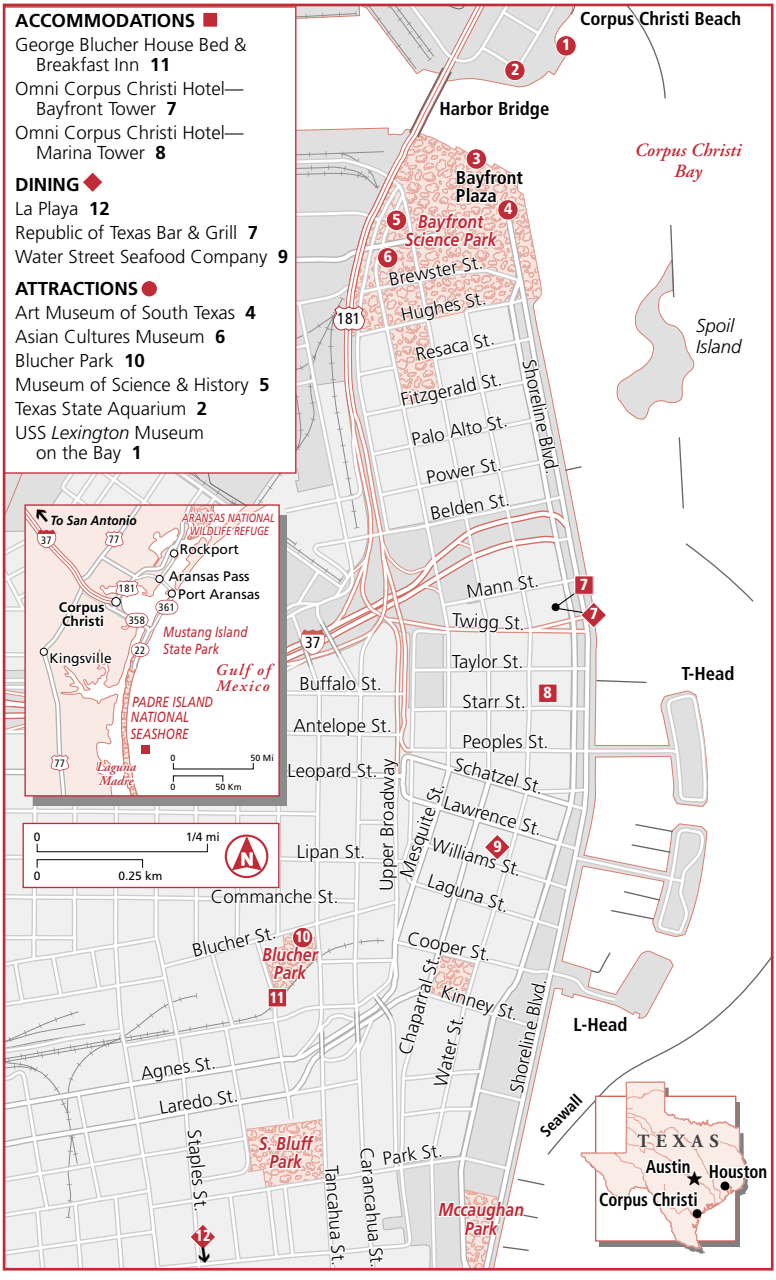
#### Getting Around

Most visitors to Corpus Christi will use a car to get around. This is an easy city to navigate. Traffic isn't bad except during rush hour.

In the downtown area, highways I-37 and Tex. 286 (known as the Crosstown Expwy.) intersect. Connected to both is Corpus Christi's busiest freeway, known as South Padre Island Drive, or s.p.i.d., as it appears on signs. It does in fact lead to Padre Island. For a nice drive around the bay from the downtown area, take Ocean Drive, which skirts the south shore.

#### Visitor Information

Contact the **Corpus Christi Convention & Visitors Bureau,** 1201 N. Shoreline Blvd. (✆ **800/766-2322;** www.corpuschristicvb.com). If you're already in Corpus, go to the visitor center located at 1823 N. Chaparral (✆ **361/561-2000**). It's open from 9am to 5pm Tuesday through Saturday.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Laguna Madre
50 Mi
50 Km
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TEXAS
Austin
Houston
Corpus Christi

**FAST FACTS** The **Corpus Christi Medical Center** (www.ccmedicalcenter.com) has three locations: Doctors Regional, 3315 S. Alameda (✆ **361/761-1400**); Bay Area, 7101 S. Padre Island Dr. (✆ **361/761-1200**); and the Heart Hospital, 7002 Williams Dr. (✆ **361/761-6800**). The main **post office,** 809 Nueces Bay Blvd., is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### The Top Attractions

**Texas State Aquarium** (Kids) Several tanks display a variety of ecosystems found in the Gulf of Mexico and coastal Texas, from coral reefs with sharks and barracuda swimming about to jetty systems populated by crabs and flounders to East Texas swamps and their alligators. Specialty tanks are dedicated to some of the most curious forms of sea life, such as octopuses, turtles, and sea horses. And in the touch pools you can touch a stingray or bamboo shark if that's what you really want to do. The latest addition to the aquarium is Dolphin Bay, a protected environment for Atlantic bottle-nosed dolphins that are unable to survive in the wild. Children enjoy the Kids' Port Playground, and there's also a gift shop and food court. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

2710 N. Shoreline Blvd. ✆ **800/477-4853** or 361/881-1200. www.texasstateaquarium.org. Admission $16 adults, $14 seniors 60 and older, $11 children 3–12, free for children 2 and under. Daily 9am–5pm; open until 6pm Memorial Day to Labor Day. Closed Thanksgiving and Dec 25. Parking $4.

**USS *Lexington* Museum on the Bay** ★★ This World War II–era aircraft carrier is a floating naval museum. During the war, the *Lexington* was in almost every major operation in the Pacific theater, and planes from her decks destroyed 372 enemy aircraft in flight and an additional 475 on the ground. She was dubbed "The Blue Ghost" because of the ship's blue-gray color, and because Japanese propaganda radio broadcaster Tokyo Rose repeatedly and mistakenly announced that the *Lexington* had been sunk. The *Lexington* was modernized in the 1950s and served in the U.S. 7th Fleet, including duty during the Vietnam War.

Tours of the "Lady Lex" are self-guided. A big-screen theater shows IMAX movies, and a video details the history of the ship with historic film footage. There are a number of exhibits, such as a Navy Seal submarine and interpretive displays of ship engines, plus a flight simulator that, for $4 per person, provides a wild 5-minute ride simulating the experience of flying. But being on the actual boat, climbing up and down ladders between decks, seeing the ship's hospital and mess hall, and exploring its narrow passages give the visitor a more concrete sense of what life was like on this carrier than any film. Not many museums can do this sort of thing. On the flight deck are more than a dozen aircraft from the 1930s to the 1960s, including an F-14A Tomcat and a Cobra helicopter. You can also get a close-up look at the ship's 40-millimeter antiaircraft guns. The *Lexington* has a large gift shop and a snack bar. Allow at least 2 hours.

***Note:*** Although some parts of the USS *Lexington* are easily accessible by anyone, seeing many of the best parts, such as the flight deck, bridge, and engine room, involves climbing a lot of steep, old metal stairs and ladders, stepping over metal barricades, and maneuvering through tight passageways. Those with mobility problems will most likely not be able to get to everything.

2914 N. Shoreline Blvd., in Corpus Christi Bay. ✆ **800/523-9539** or 361/888-4873. www.usslexington.com. Admission $13 adults, $8 children 4–12, $11 seniors 60 and older and active military. Free admission to the Hangar Deck for those with disabilities. Daily 9am–5pm; open until 6pm Memorial Day to Labor Day. Last entry half-hour before closing. Parking $3.50.

## Other Attractions

Just north of downtown is the city's striking convention center. Nearby are a visitor center at 1823 N. Chaparral St. and a handful of small museums including the **Art Museum of South Texas,** the **Asian Cultures Museum,** and the **Museum of Science and History.** Before going to any of these, first step into the visitor center to see if any coupons are available. Visiting these museums, which are small to medium size, is a nice way to spend a rainy afternoon.

Adding to Corpus Christi's small-town amusements is a minor-league baseball team in the Texas league called the **Corpus Christi Hooks** (✆ **361/561-4665;** www.cchooks.com). Home games are played at Whataburger Field, which is a beautiful ballpark at the water's edge near the foot of the tall bridge that spans the Nueces River. (Whataburger is a successful chain of burger joints with restaurants all across the South and Southwest. It began in Corpus in 1950. During your stay here, you'll see lots of these restaurants with their trademark orange-and-white roofs.)

## Outdoor Activities

Watersports, birding, and fishing are the most popular activities. Certain parts of this area lend themselves to different kinds of watersports. Birding is good throughout; it just depends on what species you're looking for. Here is a rundown of activities and where best to do them.

**FISHING/BOATING** For deep-sea fishing, you're better off going to Port Aransas, which is on Mustang Island facing the open water. You'll save fuel costs that way. For bay fishing, you can find guides and charter boats in Corpus, Rockport, or Port Aransas. Shoreline fishing is popular in these parts, with numerous piers, jetties, and beaches, depending on your tastes. In Corpus a charter boat usually costs from $300 to $400 for a full-day trip for one or two people. For a good fishing guide, contact the visitor center. For party boats and general boat trips, contact **Captain Clark's Flagship** (✆ **361/884-8306;** www.captclarksflagship.com), in downtown Corpus where People's Street meets the bay. Regular cruises are seasonal.

**SAILING** Corpus has a wonderful large bay for sailing, and every Wednesday afternoon there's a friendly sailboat race in the bay by downtown. Corpus has a reputation for having lots of good sailing weather. For rentals, lessons, or cruises contact the **Yachting Center—Corpus Christi** (✆ **361/881-8503;** www.yachtingcc.com). It's located in the downtown marina at 200 S. Shoreline.

**SEA KAYAKING** This is becoming wildly popular in the area, and is being combined with fishing or nature photography. Most of the interesting sites are near Rockport—see the "Rockport" section, below.

**WINDSURFING** Corpus's reputation for good breezes also draws a lot of windsurfers. Annual windsurfing regattas are held here. An ideal place to windsurf or take lessons is at Bird Basin in the Padre Island National Seashore, which is described later in this chapter.

**WHOOPING CRANE TOURS** The world-famous whooping cranes inhabit the Aransas National Wildlife Preserve from mid-November to mid-April. The best place to buy a ticket on a tour boat is Rockport, which lies closest to the preserve. You can also rent kayaks there and paddle around the shore of the preserve, but under no circumstances are you allowed to set foot on land. For more info, see the Rockport section.

Among the numerous national chain motels in Corpus Christi are **Best Western Garden Inn,** 11217 I-37, exit 11B (✆ 800/937-8376 or 361/241-6675); **Comfort Suites,** 3925 S.P.I.D. (✆ 800/228-5150 or 361/225-2500); **Embassy Suites Hotel,** 4337 S.P.I.D. (✆ 800/362-2779 or 361/853-7899); and **La Quinta,** 5155 I-37, exit 3A (✆ 800/687-6667 or 361/888-5721). A reasonably priced independent motel is the **Sea Shell Inn,** 202 Kleberg Place (✆ 361/888-5291), with rates for two of $50 to $125. Room tax adds 15% to rates, and the highest rates in the Corpus Christi area are in the summer.

**George Blucher House Bed & Breakfast Inn ★★★** This wonderful B&B combines the ambience of an elegant historic home with modern amenities, including private bathrooms and plush robes. Built in 1904 for George and Alice Von Blucher, this 5,000-square-foot inn was purchased in 1999 by history buff Tracey Smith, who thoroughly researched the home's past before beginning restoration. After about a year of work, the B&B opened with six rooms, each named after one of the Blucher children. The ultrafeminine Pearl's Room is pink, with American and French antiques, a queen-size bed, and a private balcony with views of downtown; and Nellie's Room is decorated in a floral motif, with American and French country furnishings and two twin beds. Most rooms are on the second floor, but one ground-level unit, Jasper's Room, is wheelchair accessible.

The attention to detail that Ms. Smith showed in restoring the house also shows in her management of the B&B. The bed linens are first-rate and coffee is readily available. Breakfasts here are a splendid event, and might include entrees such as chicken pecan quiche or eggs Benedict with artichokes, spinach, and cream cheese; and a fruit dish such as baked apple with maple syrup and pecans and wrapped in a puff pastry. A library has a comfortable sitting area and chess, dominos, backgammon, and other games. In addition, the inn is across the street from **Blucher Park,** a prime bird-watching area. Smoking is not permitted inside.

211 N. Carrizo, Corpus Christi, TX 78401. ✆ **866/884-4884** or 361/884-4884. Fax 361/884-4885. www.georgeblucherhouse.com. 6 units. $119–$189 double. Rates include full breakfast. Holiday and special event weekends require a minimum 2-night stay. MC, V. Children 13 and older accepted with prior approval. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, dataport, Wi-Fi, hair dryer, iron.

**Omni Corpus Christi Hotel ★★** The best choice in Corpus Christi for those seeking a full-service hotel with a view of the bay is the Omni. It consists of two towers, Bayfront and Marina. I prefer the Bayfront. The spacious rooms are simply appointed in a modern hotel style, and all have private balconies. Standard rooms have two doubles or one king-size bed, large working desks, plush chairs, large closets, and several telephones. The basic king rooms come with floor-to-ceiling windows that offer spectacular views of the Gulf, particularly from the upper floors of the 20-story Bayfront Tower. One of the three on-site restaurants is the highly rated Republic of Texas Bar & Grill (p. 231). Because this hotel gets a lot of weekday business travelers, you're likely to get good rates on weekends.

900 and 707 N. Shoreline Blvd., Corpus Christi, TX 78401. ✆ **800/843-6664** or 361/887-1600. Fax 361/887-6715. www.omnihotels.com. 821 units. $154–$198 double; suites from $300. Golf packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 heated indoor/outdoor pools; nearby golf course; nearby lit tennis courts; fully equipped health club; Jacuzzi; dry sauna; airport shuttle; salon; limited room service; massage; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

## Camping

RVers have plenty of camping choices in the Corpus Christi area, and although many of the RV parks will accept tenters, the rates are often the same as for sites with RV hookups; those in tents will be surrounded by RVs. Tenters should camp at nearby Padre Island National Seashore (see section 6, later in this chapter) or one of the other public parks in the area.

Among RV parks here, the best is **Colonia del Rey,** 1717 Waldron Rd., near the entrance to Padre Island (✆ **800/580-2435** for reservations, or 361/937-2435; www.campingfriend.com/coloniadelrey), which has a swimming pool, a Jacuzzi, and all the other usual amenities, and can accommodate rigs up to 85 feet long. Some sites have telephones, and rates are $21 to $23 for full hookups, including cable TV.

# WHERE TO DINE

For a quick bite, you can try a burger from the chain that began here in Corpus—**Whataburger.** At least you won't have trouble finding one here; they're everywhere, and they're generally open late.

**La Playa** ★★ Finds TEX-MEX Part of the enjoyment of hanging out in South Texas is the excellent Tex-Mex food. This place has some great food and a menu large enough to meet everyone's tastes. The fajitas garner most of the attention here, but I think the restaurant's forte might be the enchiladas, of which there are several kinds. Especially good are the Tex-Mex with the traditional chili gravy or the green enchiladas with a nicely done tangy sauce. Something that's different on the menu (and very popular) is the deep-fried stuffed avocado. Order it if you dare. For dessert try the sopapillas or the flan. A second location is at 7118 S.P.I.D.

4201 S.P.I.D. ✆ **361/980-3909.** Main courses $8–$16. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm; Sun 11am–9pm.

**Republic of Texas Bar & Grill** ★★ Moments STEAK This is the spot to celebrate a special occasion. Located on the 20th floor of the Omni Bayfront hotel, the Republic of Texas Bar & Grill is expensive and special. It has a unique terraced dining room, which, from every table, affords breathtaking views of the bay and the city through extratall plate-glass windows. Appetizers include a giant portobello mushroom, stuffed with sweet sausage and garlic herb cheese. This is primarily a steakhouse, and all beef is top USDA premium choice corn-fed that is hand cut and grilled over a fire of oak and mesquite. The menu usually also offers several game dishes, such as mesquite-grilled quail, and seafood. Sides include huge baked Idaho potatoes and garlic mashed potatoes, which are fine, but the house specialty hash browns are exquisite. There is also an extensive wine list. Service is excellent.

At the Omni Bayfront Hotel, 900 N. Shoreline Blvd. ✆ **361/886-3515.** www.omnihotels.com/republic. Reservations recommended. Main courses $20–$40. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30–10:30pm; Sun 5:30–9pm.

**Water Street Seafood Company** ★★★ SEAFOOD Considered by most locals to be the best seafood restaurant in Corpus Christi, this restaurant and its sister, the Water Street Oyster Bar, pack in the customers for dinner. What brings them in is the mesquite-grilled fish or the pecan-crusted oysters (which are something special). The cooking combines Southern and Mexican styles. I really enjoyed the Gulf crab cakes served with a spicy rémoulade and mango salsa. The specials on the chalkboard are quite yummy, too. Everything at Water Street is prepared fresh, and the staff is accommodating

about making substitutions, meeting individuals' dietary needs, or providing smaller portions (at a lower price!).

309 N. Water St. ✆ **361/882-8683.** Reservations not accepted but you can call ahead to be put on the waiting list. Main courses $9–$23. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Closed Thanksgiving and Dec 25.

## 4 ROCKPORT ★★

35 miles NE of Corpus Christi; 182 miles SW of Houston; 161 miles SE of San Antonio

Rockport and its sister town, Fulton, are on the other side of the bay from Corpus, on the mainland coast facing out toward San Jose Island, which encloses Aransas Bay. The two towns have a combined population of 9,000. Rockport has more character than its neighbor and has become an art town, with resident artists, galleries, and the Rockport Art Center. The old downtown area is small and charming, with shops, galleries, and restaurants. But Rockport isn't in danger of becoming a fancy place; it's comfortable and feels lived in. Old-style motel courts, still the most common lodging option here, are testament to a time not so long ago when Rockport was a summer retreat for Texans looking for a quiet, economical place to enjoy the water. That's changing. A modern subdivision marina community has developed between the two towns, a Wal-Mart is going up, and a Holiday Inn Express has opened.

This part of the coast is particularly lovely. Notable are the many windswept oak trees, which are a favorite subject for artists and have become emblematic of the area. Of course, water is everywhere. A large protected wetlands area to the north, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, is the winter home to the only natural colony of whooping cranes in the world. But this is only one of several natural areas in the region. Birding and fishing are two of the major draws. But if a beach is what you're looking for, the best are out on the barrier islands described in the next two main sections.



### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Rockport is 45 minutes from Corpus Christi. Take Tex. 35 over the Harbor Bridge toward Portland. Well after the Aransas Pass turnoff, take the exit labeled market st. (FM 1069). Both Rockport and Fulton are on Bus. 35, which continues north over the Copano Bay Causeway to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** For maps or info contact the **Rockport–Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce,** 404 Broadway, Rockport, TX 78382 (✆ **800/826-6441** or 361/729-6445; www.rockport-fulton.org).

**FAST FACTS** The nearest full-service hospital, with a 24-hour emergency room, is **North Bay Hospital,** 11 miles south of Rockport at 1711 W. Wheeler Ave., Aransas Pass (✆ **361/758-8585**). The **post office,** located at 1550 FM 2165 in Rockport, is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 4:30pm, Saturday from 9am to noon.

### WHAT TO SEE & DO

#### The Top Attraction

This region is among the nation's premier bird-watching destinations, and the best spot for birding here is the **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge ★★** (✆ **361/286-3559;** http://southwest.fws.gov). More than 300 species of birds have been spotted here, but the whooping crane, which winters here from November to April, is the big draw.

## Whooping Cranes: Back from the Brink of Extinction

By and large, there are two kinds of tourists who come to the Rockport area in winter: wint er Texans fleeing the harsh c old of their nor thern homes and nature enthusiasts who c ome to visit another sor t of wint er Texan, the magnificent whooping cranes. The largest birds in America, these cranes fly in from northwest C anada in Oc tober/November and lea ve again in the spring . An adult male stands 5 f eet high and can ha ve a wingspan of 8 f eet. They are elegant, too: Elongated legs and thr oat give them dramatic lines , and the plumage has a classic appeal that never goes out of fashion—solid white with black wing tips, black eyeliner, and just a touch of red accent on the top of the head. It would be a tr emendous blow to lose these cr eatures to oblivion, but that is almost what happened—and their c omeback st ory is pr obably the most famous of all the cases of wildlif e conservation.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, these birds inhabited the Gulf and Atlantic shores in winter and northern Midwest and Canada in summer. But hunting and loss of habitat dwindled the population until , by 1941, only 15 bir ds survived. All w ere members of the flock that wint ers her e on the c entral Texas coast. A concerted effort requiring the contributions of many dedicated biologists and field w orkers was launched t o sa ve them. The team first pushed f or laws pr eserving the summer and wint er nesting g rounds and all the major stopover points along the 2,400 miles of the mig ration route. The cranes were slow to come back, but through protection and public education, their mortality rat es decr eased and the population began t o grow. This was difficult and took time because these cranes ar e slow to mature and don't reproduce until their fourth year. And even then the female lays only two eggs and raises only one chick. Worried that with only one flock the species was vulnerable , biologists began stealing the second eggs and hatching them elsewhere. They have established a nonmig rating population in south c entral F lorida and another population that they 've been "teaching" t o mig rate bet ween Wisconsin and western Florida. So far it's working, but the Aransas flock is still the lar gest and only natural population of "whoopers" in the world. This year their numbers hit an all-time high of 224.

The best wa y t o view the bir ds is fr om the deck of a boat. S everal boats specialize in bir ding and whooping crane t ours. They sk irt along the c oast of the refuge, which is the favorite feeding grounds for the cranes. A few are listed below.

In addition to bir ds, the r efuge is home to about 30 species of snakes (only four ar e poisonous), turtles, lizards, and the refuge's largest reptile, the American alligator. Mammals commonly seen include white-tailed deer , jav elina, wild boars, raccoons, eastern cottontail rabbits, and nine-banded armadillos. Also pr esent, but only occasionally seen, are bobcats and opossums.

A 16-mile paved auto tour loop meanders through a variety of habitats, offering access to a 40-foot observation tower, a boardwalk that leads through a salt marsh to the coastline, and other viewing areas. The refuge has nine walking trails, ranging from .1 to 1.4 miles, a picnic area, and an impressive Wildlife Interpretive Center with information, exhibits, a bookstore, and administration offices. There are also seasons for hunting and saltwater fishing access. Camping is not permitted.

The refuge is located about 36 road miles northeast of Rockport via Tex. 35, FM 774, and FM 2040. It's open daily from just before sunrise to just after sunset; the Wildlife Interpretive Center is open daily from 8:30am to 4:30pm. Admission to the refuge costs $5 per vehicle ($3 if there's only one person). Binoculars are available to borrow at the Wildlife Interpretive Center. Insect repellent is recommended year-round.



## Outdoor Activities

**FISHING** There are public fishing piers in Fulton Harbor and at Rockport Beach Park, as well as numerous other areas. Fishing guides offer bay and deep-sea fishing trips, and rates vary considerably. Contact **Gold Spoon Charters** (✆ **361/727-9178;** www.goldspooncharters.com), **Green Hornet Fishing Guide Service** (✆ **361/749-5904**), and **Hook Line & Sinker** (✆ **866/993-3131** or 361/727-0910).

**KAYAKING** All the different bays around Rockport are well sheltered by the barrier islands. In some places the water gets quite shallow and is broken into narrow channels by mangroves. One such place is called Lighthouse Lakes. This is perfect territory for kayaking, which you can combine with birding, fishing, or nature photography. The important thing is to find renters who have a big enough selection that they can fit you with the appropriate kayak for your needs. You might talk to the people at **Rockport Kayak Outfitters** at 106 S. Austin St. (✆ **361/729-1505**). They offer rentals and tours. Tours require a minimum of four people, but you might be able to hook up with another group or get a self-guided tour on your own with one of their maps. They can haul you and your kayaks to a drop-off spot and pick you up later.

**PARKS** Anglers and birders especially like **Goose Island State Park** (✆ **361/729-2858;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/goose), which is home to the Big Tree, a giant live oak with seemingly countless twisting branches that is estimated to be more than 1,000 years old. It's more than 35 feet in circumference, 44 feet high, and has a crown spread of 90 feet. The park has a short paved hiking and biking path, two playgrounds, picnic tables and grills, a boat ramp, and a lighted fishing pier. Fish caught here include speckled trout, redfish, flounder, and sheepshead. Crabbing and oystering are also popular. There are 102 campsites with water and electric hookups and 25 sites with water only and the park also has restrooms with showers and an RV dump station. Entrance to the park costs $5 per person per day (free for children 12 and under), and camping costs an additional $10 to $15 per night, with reservations available (✆ **512/389-8900**). The park is about 12 miles from Rockport. Follow Tex. 35 north 10 miles to Park Road 13, which you follow 2 miles east to the park entrance. There are several preserves and wildlife sanctuaries in and about the area, which make for good birding.

**WHOOPING CRANE TOURS/DOLPHIN TOURS** From November to March, a number of companies offer 3- to 4-hour whooping crane and birding tours on shallow-draft boats. Cost is about $35 per person, with discounts for children and seniors; several companies take small groups at a flat rate of $150 to $200. Some guarantee that you'll see whooping cranes. Among those that charge per person are **Captain Billy Gaskins** (✆ 866/729-2997 or 361/729-2997); **Captain Ted's Whooping Crane Tours**

(✆ 800/338-4551 or 361/729-9589); and **Captain Eddy Polhemus Pisces** (✆ 361/729-7525). Most of these boats leave out of Fulton harbor, so you might want to go down and check out the boats for yourself and find one with a convenient departure time. Several boats do dolphin tours as well. Those offering the flat-rate option for up to four people include **Captain Sally's Reel Fun Charters** (✆ 361/729-9095; www.captainsally.com). **Aransas Bay Birding Charters** (✆ 361/727-2689) offers 6-hour tours for up to six people for $300. Check with the Rockport–Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce (see "Visitor Information," above) for information on land-based birding tours.

## Indoor Attractions

**Fulton Mansion ★** Constructed between 1874 and 1877 by cattle baron George Fulton, this mansion is the local architectural landmark. The site is managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which offers hourly tours (except at noon) from 9am to 3pm Wednesday to Saturday. Built in French Empire style, it was notable in its day for having indoor plumbing and other modern conveniences. The materials used are rich and varied, and the interiors are impressive.

316 S. Fulton Beach Rd. ✆ **361/729-0386.** Admission $5. By tour only. Wed–Sat 9am, 10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm, and 3pm. Closed major holidays.

**Rockport Center for the Arts ★** Part of the charm of Rockport is that its small downtown area is such an inviting place to hang about and relax. And this center is a good place to begin. The Main Gallery presents about 10 changing exhibits each year that range from local to international artists. There are often displays of students' work, and sometimes hands-on exhibits, in the Garden Gallery. The Members Gallery presents an eclectic selection of works by members of the Rockport Art Association, which manages the center. The Rockport Art Association sponsors the Rockport Art Festival each summer, in late June and/or early July, and also sponsors a series of art classes, workshops, and concerts (call for the current schedule).

902 Navigation Circle, Rockport. ✆ **361/729-5519.** www.rockportartcenter.com. Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 1–4pm.

**Texas Maritime Museum** From pirates to shipbuilding to offshore oil drilling, this excellent small museum brings to life the story of the Texas Gulf Coast, with lots of hands-on exhibits, historic fishing gear, and old strange-looking outboard motors. Among its changing and permanent exhibits, you'll see artwork, such as the *Lighthouses of Texas* watercolors by Harold Phenix, and a life-size ship's bridge where you can imagine yourself on the high seas. On the museum grounds are a survival capsule (used to escape offshore oil rigs in emergencies), a 26-foot-long lifeboat, and a replica of a sco w sloop fishing boat. Allow at least 1 hour.

1202 Navigation Circle, Rockport. ✆ **361/729-1271.** www.texasmaritimemuseum.org. Admission $5 adults, $4 seniors 60 and older, $2 children 6–12, free for children 5 and under. Tues–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 1–4pm. Closed major holidays.

## WHERE TO STAY

Among the national chain motels in the Rockport and Fulton areas are the **Best Western Inn by the Bay,** 3902 N. Tex. 35, Fulton (✆ **800/235-6076** or 361/729-8351); **Days Inn,** 1212 E. Laurel St. (at Tex. 35), Rockport (✆ **800/329-7466** or 361/729-6379); and **Holiday Inn Express,** 901 Hwy. 35 N., Rockport (✆ **888/727-2566** or 361/727-0283).

**Crane House** ★★★ Moments As a travel writer, you see so many hotels, condos, and other lodgings that it sometimes all becomes a blur; and if you don't take notes you begin confusing them. There is no danger of that happening with this place; it's truly one of a kind. Crane House is an attractive and comfortable house with two bedrooms (one king and two twins), two bathrooms, a full kitchen, and a large screened porch. But it could have been a shack with bunk beds and an outhouse, and it would still have been special because it offers those rare commodities of privacy, solitude, and natural beauty, all in abundance. It sits alone on 824 acres bordering the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, with a mile of coastline on St. Charles Bay (use of kayak included). The owners are in partnership with the Texas Nature Conservancy to protect more than 200 acres of wetlands that are part of the property. And, as if that weren't enough, a pair of whooping cranes are daily visitors to the backyard, and to view or photograph them you have to go no farther than the porch. And how many establishments have a guard horse looking after the place?

911 S. Water St., Rockport, TX 78382 (for reservations). ✆ **361/729-7239.** www.cranehouseretreat.com. 1 unit. $225–$275. No credit cards. Pets accepted. **Amenities:** Full kitchen; kayak. *In room:* A/C.

**Hoope's House** ★★ With some B&Bs, like this one, you know the second you walk in that you're looking at a labor of love. The owners have taken great pains in restoring the house and furnishing the rooms. The house has four garden rooms and four rooms in the house. The garden rooms are larger and offer more privacy (I like the San Jose and the Aransas), but the rooms in the house have more character and are absolutely charming (I like the Live Oak and the Blackjack). The pool is great, the grounds are immaculate, and the innkeepers are easygoing, down-to-earth types.

417 N. Broadway, Rockport, TX 78382. ✆ **800/924-1008** or 361/729-8424. Fax 361/790-9288. www.hoopeshouse.com. 8 units. $160 double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Pool; Jacuzzi; bikes; tour info; in-room massage; fishing equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

**The Lighthouse Inn** ★★ For a full-service hotel, this independently owned property right on the water is your best choice. All rooms have balconies with a view of the bay and a couple of rocking chairs from which to enjoy it. Pelicans like to fish right off the shore. Standard rooms are medium size, immaculate, and comfortably furnished. They come with two queen-size beds. The suites have a full kitchen, a completely separate sitting area, and two TVs.

200 S. Fulton Beach Rd., Rockport, TX 78382. ✆ **866/790-8439** or 361/790-8439. Fax 361/790-7393. www.lighthousetexas.com. 78 units. $129–$199 double; $169–$209 captain's suite; $299–$399 2-bedroom suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; fitness room; Jacuzzi; tour info; room service until 10pm; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Village Inn Motel** This two-story older motel—some parts are pre-1930—works for those seeking economical, comfortable lodging within walking distance of Rockport's beach, piers, attractions, and restaurants. Inside the bright yellow exterior are a wide variety of simply decorated units. The rooms are larger than average, from one to four beds. Several standard rooms have small refrigerators and microwaves; there are also kitchenette units and several two-bedroom apartments with full kitchens. Twelve units have shower only; the rest have tub/shower combos.

503 N. Austin St., Rockport, TX 78382. ✆ **800/338-7539** for reservations, or 361/729-6370. www.village-inn-motel.com. 26 units . Summer $60–$70 double , $65–$80 k itchenette units , $100–$130 2-bedr oom apartments; winter $55–$60 double , $60–$75 k itchenette units , $105 2-bedr oom apar tments. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Pets accepted ($10 per pet per day). **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen and fridge in some units.

## WHERE TO DINE

For light sandwich-type food or for takeout, tr y **Tony Legner's Culinary Productions** in do wntown R ockport at 1003 E. Concho ( ✆ **361/729-6395**). This deli/restaurant makes excellent pizza that you can eat there or take back to your hotel. It's open Tuesday to Saturday 11am to 6pm.

**Latitude 28°02′ ★★** SEAFOOD It's always gr eat to eat at a r estaurant that ser ves locally caught seafood; a little attention in dealing with local suppliers ensures quality and freshness. This is the case her e, and there's no shor tage of appealing dishes on the menu in addition to the nightly chef 's specials. There are nonseafood dishes as w ell, including beef, chicken, and v egetarian options. The dining r oom is simple, comfor table, and attractive. The tables ar e w ell separated, and the walls ser ve as galler y space, holding works by local ar tists.

105 N. Austin St. ✆ **361/727-9009.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$30. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 5–10pm.

**Los Comales ★** MEXICAN/TEX-MEX An unpretentious Mexican food joint just a few blocks from Rockport's downtown area, Los Comales serves up some excellent dishes from a fairly large menu. All the standards, such as fajitas, and the sides, such as borracho beans, are done really well. One of the dishes that this place is kno wn for is the stuffed, deep-fried avocado. Also terrific ar e the E nchiladas Tarascas, which hav e a tangy gr een sauce. You can also ask for some uncommon v egetarian options such as spinach and mushroom enchiladas.

431 H wy. 35. ✆ **361/729-3952.** M ain c ourses $5–$15. AE, DISC, MC, V. M on–Sat 11am–10pm; Sun 11am–9pm.

## 5 PORT ARANSAS ★

30 miles NE of Corpus Christi; 155 miles S of San Ant onio

Port Aransas is a funky Texas-style beach to wn located on the nor th end of M ustang Island. It has nearly 4,000 permanent residents, but at any given time at least a couple of thousand island condo dw ellers descend on the to wn for gr oceries, a beer , and such. Unlike Corpus and Rockport, Port Aransas is situated on open water. (Actually, it's open water in one dir ection, and the bay in the other .) H ence y ou get big, br oad, sandy beaches, and some watersports that the other destinations don't offer. The town is different from Rockport also in that R ockport has other economic activities besides tourism. That's not really true for Port A (as the locals call it), which depends on winter Texans, fishing enthusiasts, surfers, and sun worshipers for its existence. This is why the town has a little mor e party spirit, which y ou can easily discern if y ou go barhopping her e. That said, the perfect time *not* to come here is during spring br eak, when college students fill the town and disrupt the calm, small-town feel of the place.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** Port Aransas is just over 30 minutes from Corpus Christi. The quickest way to get here is to take South Padre Island Drive (S.P.I.D.) out to Mustang Island and then drive north. But you can also get here by taking Tex. 35 north, as you would go to Rockport, but take the exit for Aransas Pass (Hwy. 361) and keep going until you see signs for the ferry. The ferry is free and is a very short ride that drops you off in the middle of town. Port Aransas is compact, and most of the watersports activities can be found by just walking around the town's harbor.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Just after you get off the ferry, you'll see the visitor center on your right at 421 W. Cotter (✆ **800/452-6278** or 361/749-5919; www.portaransas.org). The staff is very helpful.

**FAST FACTS** The nearest full-service hospital, with a 24-hour emergency room, is **North Bay Hospital** at 1711 W. Wheeler Ave., Aransas Pass (✆ **361/758-8585**).

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

**BEACHCOMBING** Okay, so maybe you want a beach that's completely free of cars and all signs of human settlement, where you can walk along in perfect communion with nature. If so, the obvious choice is San Jose Island, right across from Port A. It's privately owned by a Texas oil family and kept pristine. Transporting people to the island is the Jetty Boat ($10 per adult, $5 per child round-trip), which makes 10 trips daily. Visit **Fisherman's Wharf** at 900 N. Tarpon St. (✆ **800/605-5448** or 361/749-5760). ***Note:*** Whatever you might need on the island, you'll have to bring with you. This island is also a good place to collect seashells.

**BEACH CRUISING** Texas beaches tend to be broad and flat and extend for miles. Driving is permitted on most beaches, and cruising is one of the favorite pastimes of the vacationing Texan. The idea is to pack a cooler in the car filled with picnic supplies; take along other essentials such as towels, beach chairs, and perhaps a beach umbrella; and then drive to the beach and slowly cruise along until you find your spot. Always go very slow (it's a matter of courtesy) and stay on the packed sand; don't get into the loose stuff. The beach on the Gulf side of Mustang Island is miles long, but isn't continuous; there are places where you have to get back on the road. But somewhere along there, you're going to find your spot. One possibility is at **Mustang Island State Park** ★★ (✆ **361/749-5246;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/mustang), which has more than 5 miles of wide, sandy beach, with fine sand, few rocks and broken shells, and almost enough waves for surfing.

**BIKE RENTAL** Port A is a nice town to explore on a bike. You can rent one with **Nautical Wheelers,** located at 428 S. Alister St. (✆ **361/749-3003**).

**DOLPHIN TOURS** **Dolphin Watch** runs dolphin and nature tours on its boat, the *Mustang.* Call ✆ **361/749-6969** or just ask at Woody's Sports Center, listed below.

**FISHING** A lot of fishermen complain that the bay around Port A is overfished. Still, I've run into a few boats that have had good luck. The town has more than 200 fishing guides. If you want to try deep-sea fishing from a party boat (rather than chartering your own boat), see the guys at Fisherman's Wharf, listed above. They have two large boats that go out regularly. If you want to charter, try **Woody's Sports Center** at 136 W. Cotter (✆ **361/749-5271** or 749-5252; www.gulfcoastfishing.com).

**KAYAKING** The protected side of Mustang Island has lots of sloughs and cuts and coves that teem with wildlife and that are perfect for exploring by kayak. Contact **Wet Heads** (✆ **888/749-7111**) for rentals and guided and self-guided trips. They're located on the Port Aransas main beach at marker #9.

## WHERE TO STAY

There are a number of motels in town, but only one belongs to a national chain, **Best Western Ocean Villa** at 400 E. Avenue G (✆ **800/WESTERN** [937-8376]). Two local motels I like are **Alister Square Inn** at 122 S. Alister St. (✆ **888/749-3003**), and **Captain's Quarters Inn** at 235 W. Cotter (✆ **888/272-6727**).

Condos are the most popular form of lodging on the island. The beach condos in the town area are smaller buildings, but as you drive south you pass large condo properties on the beach, which are scattered along several miles of shore. Condo owners will contract with agencies to rent these out by the week, and these agencies advertise a lot in town and on the Web. I had dealings with one agency, **Starkey Properties** (✆ **888/951-6381;** www.starkeyproperties.com), which proved very professional.

For RVs, try Mustang Island State Park. For reservations, call ✆ **512/389-8900.** They also have campsites. For a nice location closer to town, try **On the Beach RV Park** at 907 Beach Access Rd. (✆ **361/749-4909**).

**Balinese Flats** (Value) This stylish little establishment in the middle of town offers attractive two-bedroom apartments with full kitchens for a good price. In addition to the apartments, the owners are building a couple of single hotel rooms. All the units are comfortable and beautifully decorated with Mexican tiles, furniture, and accents. The bedrooms come with two queen-size beds, one queen, or two twins. Three units come with a full-size fridge; three come with a half-size fridge. Make sure to bring your cocktail fixin's so that you can enjoy the upstairs veranda with drink in hand. The same property management company owns another property that has views of the water from the protected side of the island. It's called Balinese Piers.

121 Cut-off Rd., Port Aransas, TX 78373. ✆ **888/951-6381** or 361/749-1880. Fax 361/749-3592. www.balineseflats.com. 6 units. 2-bedroom apt summer $155–$175; spring and fall $115–$175; winter $65–$75. DISC, MC, V. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, Wi-Fi, full kitchen, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**The Tarpon Inn** ★★ This is a lovely old two-story hotel that dates from 1886. It's well conserved and has plenty of character. Standard rooms are pretty small; I would go for one of the premium rooms, or better still, one of the two suites, which are extralarge and comfortable. The FDR suite (no, he didn't sleep here; he just fished here) has a large sitting room, a kitchen, a dining room, and a private porch. More romantic is the upstairs corner suite with a marvelous queen-size bed and a large tub in the bedroom. If these are over your budget, I like room no. 21, a premium queen that's spacious and has a large bathroom.

200 E. Cotter, Port Aransas, TX 78373. ✆ **800/365-6784** or 361/749-5555. Fax 361/749-4305. www.thetarponinn.com. 24 units. $79–$99 double; $89–$130 premium; $145–$250 suite. 2-night minimum stay on weekends. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; in-room massage; fishing guides and charters. *In room:* A/C, no phone.

## WHERE TO DINE

Port Aransas has a surprising number of good restaurants for a town of its size. Here I list the three I think most interesting.

**La Playa** ★★ MEXICAN/SEAFOOD This establishment has no connection with the restaurant in Corpus that shares its name. It's run by a Houston man who has been in the restaurant business for years. The food is extremely fresh and nicely prepared. Try the excellent fish tacos, a tangy *campechana* (Mexican-style seafood cocktail), or rich seafood enchiladas. Other dishes that deserve mention are the Tex-Mex enchiladas, the chicken al chipotle, and the margaritas. Vegetarian specials are available. The setting is casual, the service is excellent, and the furniture is comfortable. You can't reserve a table, but you can call ahead just before leaving for the restaurant to get your name on the waiting list.

222 Beach St. ✆ **361/749-0022.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $11–$22; lunch $7–$15. No credit cards. Tues–Thurs 11am–2:30pm and 5–9pm; Fri–Sat 11am–2:30pm and 5–10pm. Open a half-hour later during summer.

**Shells** ★★ STEAK/SEAFOOD/PASTA The owner of this restaurant had a hand in creating and running several of Austin's most highly acclaimed restaurants. He has settled into Port A to take it easy and cook only as much as he enjoys. A chalkboard lists all offerings for that particular day. Lunch items are mostly sandwiches and salads. Dinner entrees are much more elaborate affairs. On my recent visits, the owner was serving, among other tempting items, prime center-cut sirloin with a caramelized garlic glaze, sirloin medallions on top of grilled focaccia with a Gorgonzola sauce, and seared amberjack with a chile-lime sauce. The appetizers included Chinese dumplings, Thai spring rolls, and sushi. ***Note:*** This restaurant is very small, and it's common to have to wait for a table.

522 E. Ave. G. ✆ **361/749-7621.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $13–$23; lunch $7–$12. DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9pm. (Hours are not strictly kept; don't show up at the last minute, or you might find the restaurant has stopped serving.)

**Venetian Hot Plate** ★★ NORTHERN ITALIAN This restaurant's curious name owes its existence to an error in translation, and by the time the Italian owners were made aware of their mistake, it was too late to change it.The food, however, doesn't suffer from any problem in translation. Wonderful pasta dishes and a grilled polenta with bits of crumbled Gorgonzola are things to consider. There are nightly specials, and the set menu changes seasonally. The owner cares a lot about wine and prices it reasonably. The dining room is comfortable and peaceful.

232 Beach St. ✆ **361/749-7617.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$20; specials $20–$30; lunch $5–$15. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–1:30pm and 5–9 or 10pm. Open Sun during holiday weekends.



## 6 PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE ★

37 miles SE of Corpus Christi; 180 miles S of San Antonio; 414 miles S of Dallas

Some 70 miles of delightful white-sand beach, picturesque sand dunes, and warm ocean waters make Padre Island National Seashore a favorite year-round playground along the Texas Gulf Coast. One of the longest stretches of undeveloped coastline in America, this is an ideal spot for swimming, sunbathing, fishing, beachcombing, windsurfing, and camping. It also offers excellent bird-watching opportunities and a chance to see several species of rare sea turtles. The island was named for Padre José Nicolás Balli, a Mexican priest who, in 1804, founded a mission, settlement, and ranch about 26 miles north of the island's southernmost tip.

Padre Island is a barrier island, essentially a sandbar that helps protect the mainland from the full force of ocean storms. As with other barrier islands, one of the constants of Padre Island is change; wind and waves relentlessly shape and re-create the island, as grasses and other hardy plants strive to get a foothold in the shifting sands. Padre Island's Gulf side, with miles of beach accessible only to those with four-wheel-drive vehicles, offers wonderful surf fishing, while the channel between the island and mainland—the Laguna Madre—offers excellent windsurfing and a protected area for small powerboats and sailboats. This area was only lightly affected by Hurricane Dolly and should not be confused with South Padre Island.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** From Corpus Christi take Tex. 358 (South Padre Island Dr.) southeast across the JFK Causeway to Padre Island, and follow Park Road 22 south to the national seashore. The drive takes 45 minutes to an hour.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** For information, contact **Padre Island National Seashore,** P.O. Box 181300, Corpus Christi, TX 78480-1300 (✆ **361/949-8068;** www.nps.gov/pais). The Park Service also maintains a recorded beach- and road-condition information line (✆ **361/949-8175**). The park is open 24 hours a day.

The **visitor center complex,** along Park Road 22 at Malaquite Beach, has an observation deck, a bookstore, and a variety of exhibits, including one on the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle. In the same complex, **Padre Island Park Company** (✆ **361/949-9368**) sells camping and fishing supplies and gift items, and rents chairs, umbrellas, body boards, and other beach toys. The visitor center is open from 8:30am to 6pm Memorial Day through Labor Day weekend, and from 8:30am to 4:30pm the rest of the year (closed Dec 25), and the store is usually open similar hours.

**FEES & REGULATIONS** Entry for up to 7 days costs $10 per vehicle (good for 7 days) or $5 per individual on foot or bike. In addition, there is a $5 user fee at Bird Island Basin. Regulations here are much like those at other National Park Service properties, which essentially require that visitors not disturb wildlife or damage the site's natural features and facilities. Pets must be leashed and are not permitted on the swimming beach in front of the visitor center. Although driving off-road is permitted on some sections of beach, the dunes, grasslands, and tidal flats are closed to all vehicles.

**WHEN TO GO** Summer is the busiest time here, although it is generally hot (highs in the 90s/30s Celsius) and very humid. Sea breezes in late afternoon and evening help moderate the heat. Winters are mild, with highs from the 50s to the 70s (teens to the 20s Celsius), and lows in the 40s and 50s (single digits to the teens Celsius). Only occasionally does the temperature drop below 40°F (4°C), and a freeze is extremely rare. Hurricane season (June–Oct) is the rainiest time of the year and also has the highest surf. September to November is a good time to visit, when it is still usually warm enough for swimming but not nearly as hot or crowded as summer.

**SAFETY** Swimmers and those walking barefoot on the beach should watch out for the Portuguese man-of-war, a blue jellyfish that can cause an extremely painful sting. There are also poisonous rattlesnakes in the dunes, grasslands, and mud flats.

**RANGER PROGRAMS** Various **interpretive programs** are held year-round, ranging from guided beach or birding walks to talks outside the visitor center and evening campground campfire programs. These programs usually last from 30 to 45 minutes and cover subjects such as migrating or resident birds, seashells, the island's plant life or animals, or

things that wash up on the beach. There's also a **Junior Ranger Program** for kids 5 to 13, who answer questions in a free booklet and talk with rangers about the national seashore to earn certificates, badges, and sea-turtle stickers.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### Exploring the Highlights by Car

Padre Island National Seashore has an 8½-mile paved road, with good views of the Gulf and dunes, that leads to the visitor center complex. In addition, most of the beaches are open to licensed street-legal motor vehicles; some sections have hard-packed sand that makes an adequate roadbed for two-wheel-drive vehicles while most of the beach requires four-wheel-drive. See "Four-Wheeling," below.

### Outdoor Adventures

**BEACHCOMBING** The best times for beachcombing are usually early mornings and especially immediately after a storm, when you're apt to find a variety of seashells, seaweed, driftwood, and the like. These types of items can be collected, but live animals and historical or archaeological objects should be left. Among shells sometimes found at Padre Island are lightning whelks, moon snails, Scotch bonnets, Atlantic cockles, bay scallops, and sand dollars. The best shell hunting is often in winter, when storms disturb the water and thrust shells ashore; and many of the best shells are often found on Little Shell and Big Shell beaches, accessible only to those with four-wheel-drive vehicles. Metal detectors are not permitted on the beach.

**BIRDING & WILDLIFE VIEWING** More than 350 species of birds frequent Padre Island, and every visitor is bound to see and hear at least some of them. The island is a key stopping point for a variety of migratory species traveling between North and Central America, making spring and fall the best time for bird-watching. And, since a number of species winter at Padre Island, there's good birding almost year-round except for the summer. Additionally, this is the northern boundary of some Central American species, such as green jays and jaçanas.

Birding here is very easy, especially with a four-wheel-drive vehicle, which can move down the coast to the more remote stretches of beach. Experienced bird-watchers say it is best to remain in your vehicle because humans on foot scare off birds sooner than approaching vehicles. As would be expected by its name, Bird Island Basin is also a good choice for birders as long as the marshes have water. The most commonly observed bird is the laughing gull, which is a year-round resident. Other species to watch for include rare brown pelicans plus the more common American white pelicans, long-billed curlews, great blue herons, sandhill cranes, ruddy turnstones, Caspian and Royal terns, willets, Harris's hawks, reddish egrets, northern bobwhites, mourning doves, horned larks, great-tailed grackles, and red-winged blackbirds.

In addition to birds, the island is home to the spotted ground squirrel, which is often seen in the dunes near the visitor center, white-tailed deer, coyotes, black-tailed jackrabbits, lizards, and a number of poisonous and nonpoisonous snakes.

**BOATING** A boat ramp is located at Bird Island Basin, which provides access to Laguna Madre, a protected bay that is ideal for small power- and sailboats. Boat launching is not permitted on the Gulf side of the island, except for sailboats and soft-sided inflatables. To rent a sailboard, contact **Worldwinds Windsurfing** (✆ **361/949-7472;** www.worldwinds.net). Personal watercraft are not permitted in Laguna Madre (except to

## The Race to Save the Sea Turtles

The Gulf of Mexico is home to five species of sea turtles, all of which are either endangered or threatened, including the Kemp's ridley, considered to be the most endangered sea turtle in the world with only about 3,000 in existence. Kemp's ridleys have almost circular shells, grow to about 2 feet long, and weigh about 100 pounds. Adults are olive green on top and yellow below, and their main food source is crabs. Their main nesting area historically is along a 16-mile stretch of beach at Playa de Rancho Nuevo in Tamaulipas, Mexico, and although females lay about 100 eggs at a time, only about 1% of the hatchlings survive to adulthood.

In the 1970s, an international effort was begun to establish a second nesting area at Padre Island National Seashore, using the theory that sea turtles always return to the beach where they were hatched to lay their eggs. More than 22,000 eggs were gathered from Playa de Rancho Nuevo between 1978 and 1988, placed in boxes containing Padre Island sand, and shipped to Texas, where they were placed in incubators. After hatching, about 13,500 baby turtles were released on the beach at Padre Island National Seashore and allowed to crawl into the water for a quick swim. Fearing that the young turtles would become lunch for predators, National Park Service biologists captured them and sent them to a marine fisheries lab in Galveston, where they spent up to a year growing big enough to have a better chance of survival in the wild. They were then tagged and released into the Gulf of Mexico.

Since then some of the turtles have returned to Padre Island and other sections of the Texas Gulf Coast to nest, and Park Service workers have collected a number of eggs for incubation and eventual release. The eggs are collected in late spring and summer, and anyone seeing a nesting sea turtle is asked to not disturb it but to report its location to national seashore personnel. The public can attend releases of the hatchlings, which usually occur in June and August; for information on release dates, call the **Hatchling Hotline** at ✆ **361/949-7163.**

get from the boat ramp to open water outside the park boundaries) but are allowed on the Gulf side beyond the 5-mile marker.

**FISHING** Fishing is great year-round. Surf fishing is permitted everywhere along the Gulf side, except at Malaquite Beach, and yields whiting, redfish, black drum, and speckled sea trout; anglers in Laguna Madre catch flounder, sheepshead, and croaker. A Texas fishing license with a saltwater stamp is required. Licenses, along with current fishing regulations and some fishing supplies, are available at **Padre Island Park Company** (✆ **361/949-9368**). For current license information, contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (✆ **800/792-1112;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

**FOUR-WHEELING** Licensed and street-legal motor vehicles (but not ATVs) are permitted on most of the beach at Padre Island National Seashore (but not Malaquite Beach

### Tips For Travelers with Disabilities

Specially designed fat-tire wheelchairs for use in the sand, and even in the water, are available at no charge at the visitor center. They do require someone to push.

or the fragile dunes, grasslands, and tidal flats). Most standard passenger vehicles can make it down the first 5 miles of South Beach, but those planning to drive farther south down the island (another 55 miles are open to motor vehicles) will need four-wheel-drive vehicles. Markers are located every 5 miles, and those driving down the beach are advised to watch for soft sand and high water, and to carry a shovel, jack, boards, and other emergency equipment. Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit on the beach is 15 mph. Northbound vehicles have the right of way.

**HIKING** The national seashore has miles of beach that are ideal for walking and hiking. There's also the paved and fairly easy **Grasslands Nature Trail,** a .8-mile self-guided loop trail that meanders through grass-covered areas of sand dunes. Numbered posts correspond with descriptions of plants and other aspects of the natural landscape in a free brochure available at the trail head or the visitor center. You'll need insect repellent to combat mosquitoes, and because western diamondback rattlesnakes also inhabit the area, stay on the trail and watch where you put your feet and hands.

**SWIMMING & SURFING** Warm air and water temperatures make swimming practically a year-round activity here—January through March are really the only time it's too chilly—and swimming is permitted along the entire beach. The most popular swimming area is 4 1/2-mile-long Malaquite Beach, also called Closed Beach, which is closed to motor vehicles. You have to jostle for a spot only at spring break and on summer weekends. Note that there are no lifeguards on duty here. Although waves here are not of the Hawaii or California size, they're often sufficient for surfing, which is permitted in most areas, but not at Malaquite Beach.

**WINDSURFING** The Bird Island Basin area on Laguna Madre is considered one of America's best spots for windsurfing because of its warm water, shallow depth, and consistent, steady winds. **Worldwinds Windsurfing** (✆ **361/949-7472;** www.worldwinds.net) sells and rents windsurfing equipment and wet suits here, and offers windsurfing lessons during the summer. Call for current fees and schedule.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

The closest hotels and restaurants are in Corpus Christi; see section 3 in this chapter. If you want to stay in the park, you'll have to camp.

**Malaquite Campground** ★, a developed campsite at Padre Island National Seashore about a half-mile north of the visitor center, is a great spot to bed down, with 50 sites ($8 per night) that are available on a first-come, first-served basis year-round. Sites, within 100 feet of the beach, have good views of the Gulf, and the campground has cold showers, restrooms, and picnic tables. There are no RV hookups, but there is a dump station. For those who don't mind its limitations, it's definitely the best place to camp; it gets crowded only during spring break and on summer weekends.

# 7 SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

286 miles S of San Antonio; 366 miles SW of Houston; 531 miles S of Dallas; 815 miles SE of El Paso

South Padre Island is a resort town at the southern tip of this long, long barrier island. Any farther south and you would be in Mexico. The beach is much like the beach on the northern portion of the island, but the water here often seems clearer. Padre Island is a great place to stretch out on the beach, feel the Gulf breeze blowing, and hear nothing but the wash of the surf. If you get bored, you can busy yourself with boat rides, watersports, or taking the kids to the popular local water park.

On July 23, 2008, a category-1 hurricane named Dolly made landfall on South Padre Island. No one was killed in this area, but there was extensive damage to the hotels and other businesses. The recovery will largely be complete by the spring of 2009. A couple of hotels may be slow to reopen, but the city is running normally.

This part of the island is narrow—2 or 3 blocks wide—and the town starts at the southern tip and extends north for about 5 miles, with a good bit of vacant land the farther north you go. It's a small town. Most of it consists of stores, hotels, a small convention center, restaurants, condos, and vacation houses. Regular housing is in short supply because storm insurance and other costs make it prohibitive. Most of the locals commute from the mainland, from either Port Isabel or Brownsville.

South Padre Island gets a lot of families who make the trip by car or RV. Many come from northern Mexico, driving up from cities such as Monterrey and Saltillo. It also gets winter Texans. And it gets some convention business. Conventioneers and weekenders will often come by plane, via the airports at Harlingen or Brownsville. You'll find reasonably priced flights from major cities in Texas, mostly on Southwest Airlines or Continental Express. South Padre Island is famous for being a spring-break destination. Hotels will fill up with college kids, often several to a room. It's a good time to be somewhere else.

## ESSENTIALS

### Getting There

**BY PLANE** The closest airports are the **Brownsville/South Padre Island International Airport** (✆ **956/542-4373;** www.flybrownsville.com) in Brownsville (about 28 miles southwest) and the **Valley International Airport** (✆ **956/430-8600;** www.flythevalley.com) in Harlingen (about 40 miles west). All of the major car-rental companies have desks at these airports.

**BY CAR** From U.S. 77/83, which connects to Harlingen, McAllen, and Corpus Christi, take Tex. 100 east to Port Isabel and then across the Queen Isabella Causeway to the south end of South Padre Island. From Brownsville, take Tex. 48 northeast to Tex. 100.

### Getting Around

A car is handy on South Padre Island, and parking and traffic congestion are not usually a problem except during spring break and on summer weekends. The town's main street is Padre Boulevard. It runs north-south down the middle of the island. Running parallel 1 block on either side are Laguna Boulevard (west) and Gulf Boulevard (east). You don't have to drive much once you're here since many of the major hotels, restaurants, and

beaches are within walking distance of each other. Also, there is a free year-round bus service called The Wave (✆ **956/761-1025**), which operates daily from 7am to 7pm. There are two different buses. Both run the length of the town, and one goes into Port Isabel (each is clearly marked). They pass every 30 minutes along Padre Boulevard.

### Visitor Information

Contact the **South Padre Island Convention and Visitors Bureau,** 600 Padre Blvd., South Padre Island, TX 78597 ( ✆ **800/767-2373** or 956/761-6433; www.sopadre.com), which operates a visitor center. The center is just a few blocks north of the entry point on the east side of the boulevard beside a Wells Fargo branch office. Hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 5pm. On weekdays in the summer, the office stays open an extra hour later. You can pick up maps or talk to the staff for suggestions and advice.

**FAST FACTS** Health services are available at **Valley Regional Island Clinic,** 3000 Padre Blvd. (✆ **956/761-4524**). The **post office** is at 4701 Padre Blvd. and is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm, Saturday from 10am to noon.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

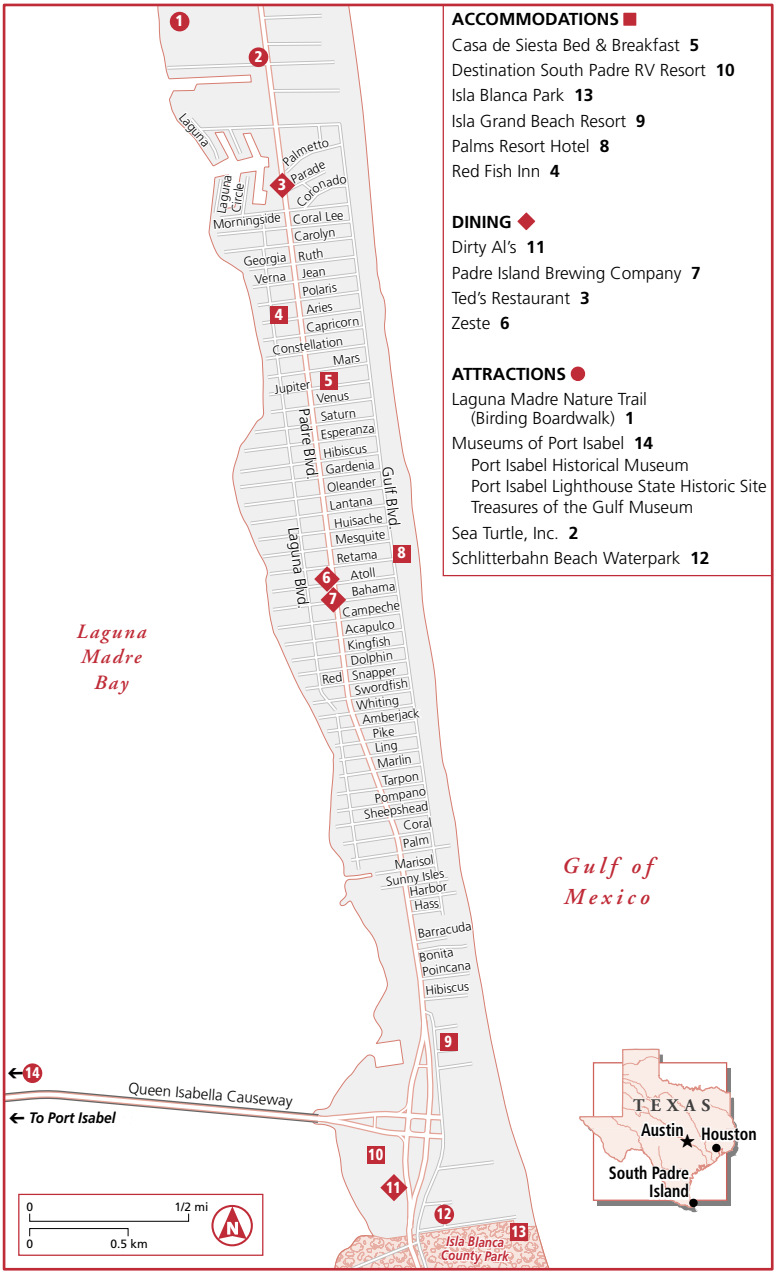
### Discovering the Area's Past

Shipwrecks, tempests, and war, as well as some of the happier aspects of life along the southern Texas coast, are the focus of the **Museums of Port Isabel** ★. Museum headquarters are in the Port Isabel Historical Museum, 317 E. Railroad Ave., Port Isabel (✆ **956/943-7602;** www.portisabelmuseums.com); another is called the Treasures of the Gulf Museum; and there's also a historic lighthouse. These are in downtown Port Isabel, are within easy walking distance of each other, and make for a good activity on a rainy day. Allow a half-hour to 1 hour to visit each one.

The **Port Isabel Historical Museum** ★, located in a restored 1899 Victorian commercial building, houses exhibits that describe the history of the area from the time it was a supply depot during the Mexican-American War, through the Civil War, and the area's development as a shrimping and fishing capital. There are interactive exhibits, a large display of Mexican-American War artifacts, and a fascinating 1906 Victor Morales "Fish Mural." The displays about shipwrecks will interest kids and adults alike. Nearby, the **Treasures of the Gulf Museum** focuses on three Spanish shipwrecks which occurred in 1554 just off the coast. Exhibits include murals, artifacts, and various hands-on activities, including a children's discovery lab. There is also a theater and gift shop.

The **Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site,** at the west end of the Queen Isabella Causeway, is hard to miss. This 72-foot-high lighthouse, which helped guide ships through Brazos Santiago Pass to Point Isabel from 1852 until 1905, now affords panoramic views of Port Isabel, South Padre Island, and as far as the eye can see out over the Gulf of Mexico. Also on the property is a replica of the lighthouse keeper's cottage made from the 1850 blueprints for the original. The cottage contains exhibits on the history of the lighthouse, and there's a picnic area.

Both museums are open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 4pm (last entry at 3:30pm), and the lighthouse and cottage are open daily from 9am to 5pm (last entry at 4pm). Admission to each site is $3 adults, $2 for seniors 55 and older, $1 for students with ID, and free for children 4 and under. Combination tickets for all three sites cost $7 for adults, $5 for seniors, and $2 for students.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Sunny Isles
Harbor
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Barracuda
Bonita
Poincana
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South Padre Island

**BIRD-WATCHING** More than 300 species of birds can be found during different times of the year. The **Laguna Madre Nature Trail** ★, adjacent to the South Padre Island Convention Centre at the north end of town, is a boardwalk that meanders out over the wetlands of the Laguna Madre and around a freshwater pond. There are a few blinds where you can set up a scope and sit for hours unseen by the birds. The boardwalk is wheelchair accessible and open 24 hours, free of charge. For birding tours in the bay, contact George and Scarlet Colley of **Fins to Feathers Photo Safaris** (✆ **956/739-2473;** www.fin2feather.com). They take small groups out into the Laguna Madre for 3-hour trips.

**DOLPHIN-WATCHING** Dolphin tours are a big activity on this island. For a great tour limited to small groups, contact **Fins to Feathers,** listed above. Scarlet Colley is a dolphin researcher and has filmed many hours of dolphin activity. The tour lasts 1 ½ hours. Another option is to take a large-boat tour, which you can sign up for at the marina, at the southern end of the island. There are a couple of companies that offer tours. The preferred one is the **Original Dolphin Watch** (✆ **956/761-4243**).

**FISHING** There have been record-setting catches made in the waters around South Padre Island: The state record blue marlin, at 876 ½ pounds, was taken offshore.

The beach and jetties are easily accessible and very popular with winter Texans (retired residents of the northern United States and Canada who spend at least part of the winter in the South Texas warmth). There are numerous local charter captains specializing in offshore big-game fishing, where anglers try for blue marlin, white marlin, sailfish, swordfish, wahoo, tuna, and mako shark. Offshore fishing also includes red drum, spotted sea trout, snapper, grouper, tarpon, and king mackerel.

The Laguna Madre, on average only 2 feet deep, is perfect for world-class light-tackle sport fishing. The lush carpet of sea grasses on its bottom provides good habitat and food for red drum, spotted sea trout, flounder, black drum, and snook, and locals brag that there are more of these fish per acre than in any other bay on the Texas Gulf.

The **Texas International Fishing Tournament (TIFT)** has been going strong for more than 60 years and attracts more than 1,000 participants each July. The 5-day event includes bay, offshore, and tarpon fishing divisions, and is open to anglers of all ages. Visit www.tift.org or contact the **South Padre Island CVB** (✆ **800/767-2373** or 956/761-6433; www.sopadre.com) for details.

**SCHLITTERBAHN BEACH WATERPARK** This is operated by the same corporation that owns the highly popular water park in the German Hill Country town of New Braunfels—hence the German name. It didn't suffer too much damage in the Hurricane and will open, as it normally does, at the beginning of tourist season, in the spring. It has a wave pool and several water rides that require sturdy bathing suits. But it also has calmer facilities such as wading and floating pools that work well for those just trying to relax. My favorite feature is the river that connects the rides so that you don't have to spend all your time out of the water waiting in line. Admission prices are $38 adults, $30 children 3 to 11 years old. The park closes during the winter (mid-Sept to mid-Apr). It's located at 90 Park Rd., Hwy. 100. For information call ✆ **956/772-7873** or visit www.schlitterbahn.com.

**SUNBATHING & SWIMMING** The beaches of South Padre Island are some of the best on the Gulf: The sand is fine and white, and the water is warm and shallow. In town there are 23 access points with free parking, plus the county has a park at each end of

### Tips Face to Face with a Sea Turtle

Each of the seven worldwide species of sea turtles is either threatened or endangered, and five species are found in the Gulf of Mexico. Ila Loetscher, affectionately dubbed the "Turtle Lady," founded Sea Turtle, Inc., in 1977 to help protect the most endangered species of sea turtles, Kemp's ridley. The organization supports conservation and rehabilitation of all marine turtles, and operates a rehabilitation center where you can see four of the five Gulf of Mexico sea turtle species. Volunteers give presentations with live sea turtles Tuesday through Sunday at 10am, which help you identify the different species and explain how each of us can help protect them. Self-guided and guided tours of the facility, including the turtle tanks, are available at other times. **Sea Turtle, Inc.,** is located at 6617 Padre Blvd. (✆ **956/761-4511;** www.seaturtleinc.com). The suggested donation is $3 for adults and $1 for children. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 4pm. Allow at least 45 minutes, and please buy something in the gift shop—all proceeds go to saving the sea turtles!

town, with a $4 all-day parking fee, good at both parks. My favorite stretch of beach is in the county park north of town. Incidentally, although lined with hotels and condos, the shoreline and adjacent beaches are public and open to everyone.

**WINDSURFING** With winds about 15 mph year-round, these waters are ideal for windsurfing. Spring and fall are best, usually with beautiful weather. Hurricane season runs from August to early November, but is not often a serious problem.

## WHERE TO STAY

Room rates vary widely in South Padre Island over the course of the year, with the lowest rates usually in winter. There are more condo units on this island than there are regular hotel rooms. These will work for you if your plan is to stay here more than a few days. Most, but not all, rent by the week. Often there's a one-time cleaning fee when you lease a condo, so it's a better deal the longer you stay. A complete list of condos is on the South Padre Island website: **www.sopadre.com**. Among the national chain motels in South Padre Island are **Days Inn,** 3913 Padre Blvd. (✆ **800/329-7466** or 956/761-7831); **Comfort Suites,** 912 Padre Blvd. (✆ **800/424-6423** or 956/772-9020); and **Super 8,** 4205 Padre Blvd. (✆ **800/800-8000** or 956/761-6300). Room tax adds about 13%.

**Casa de Siesta Bed & Breakfast ★** Attractive rooms connected by a broad, shaded breezeway encircle a leafy garden and patio. The design makes for privacy and relaxation. And on an island known as a family destination, it's nice to find an oasis for grown-ups. A small swimming pool completes the picture. The rooms are very large and decorated in a Mexican and Southwestern style: Saltillo tile floors, wrought-iron work, and folk art. You have a choice of two doubles or one king-size bed; three rooms come with four-poster beds. All have showers with attractive tile work. Smoking is allowed outside only.

4610 Padre Blvd., South Padre Island, TX 78597. ✆ **956/761-5656.** Fax 956/761-1313. www.casadesiesta.com. 12 units. Nov–Jan $99 double; Mar and June –Aug $175 double; rest of year $125 double. Extra person $20. Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. One pet per room accepted with $15/day fee. Children 11 and under not allowed. **Amenities:** Pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

**Isla Grand Beach Resort ★** This hotel used to be the Radisson, and it remains the nicest full-service hotel in town. By press time the recovery from Hurricane Dolly will be complete, including the landscaping around the pools, with plenty of palm trees and flowers. The popular beach in front of the hotel is completely refurbished. The cabanas—the "standard" rooms—are attractive and comfortable. Those with beach views are the best, and those with ocean views are the most expensive. The rooms in the tower, which are actually two-bedroom condos, are large, handsomely appointed units with sleeping for up to six, two full bathrooms, a full kitchen, and a spacious living/dining room. Get one that is above the third floor for the sake of quiet.

500 Padre Blvd., South Padre Island, TX 78597. ✆ **800/292-7704** or 956/761-6511. Fax 956/761-1602. www.islagrand.com. 188 units. Low season $115–$179 double, $215–$279 condo; high season $170–$309 beach double, $229–$535 condo. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 outdoor pools (1 heated); 4 outdoor lit tennis courts; 2 Jacuzzis; room service; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, kitchen (in condos), hair dryer, iron.

**The Palms Resort Hotel** Finds Of the three traditional beach motels that still exist, this is the nicest. The property is well maintained and well managed. If you want to be on the beach, this is a great option. Rooms are attractive and spacious and come with kitchenettes. Most come with a small dining area and have such extras as marble countertops and flatscreen TVs. Rooms on the southern side of the building are best. Bathrooms are attractive; some come with tub/shower combinations. All rooms are nonsmoking.

3616 Gulf Blvd., South Padre Island, TX 78597. ✆ **800/466-1316** or 956/761-1316. Fax 956/761-1310. www.palmsresortcafe.com. 29 units. Low season $65–$110 queen suite, $90–$130 superior and king suite; high season $80–$230 queen suite, $100–$275 superior and king suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker.

**Red Fish Inn ★** This peaceful two-story house on the bay side of the island has wraparound porches on both floors and is a relaxing place to stay. Rooms have queen-size beds and a tropical feel, with a nod toward our neighbors south of the border. Two face the bay, affording front-seat views of stunning sunsets over the Laguna Madre. All but one have showers only; one has a tub/shower combo. There are rocking chairs on the porches to entice you to sit back and relax. The inn has a boardwalk along the water and a new pier for the use of the fishing boat. The owner, a fishing guide, offers fishing packages. The homemade breakfast includes fresh fruit and juices, eggs, and tamales. Smoking is permitted outside only.

207 W. Aries Dr., South Padre Island, TX 78597. ✆ **956/761-2722.** Fax 956/761-8683. www.redfishinn.com. 7 units. Winter $99–$145 double; summer $130–$200 double. Rates include full breakfast. Fishing packages available. AE, DISC, MC, V. *In room:* A/C.

## Camping

**Isla Blanca Park ★★** (✆ **956/761-5493**), on the southern tip of South Padre Island, is our choice for a developed campground on the island, with easy beach access. Part of the Cameron County Park System (P.O. Box 2106, South Padre Island, TX 78597), this well-maintained facility has 600 paved sites, many of which are pull-through, and more than half have full RV hookups. The park also offers restrooms with showers, a dump station, a sandy beach, a fishing jetty, a boat ramp and marina, a playground, a bike trail, and beach pavilions with concessions. There is a primitive tent area right on the Laguna Madre. Rates are $25 to $30.

Those looking for a developed resort should head to **Destination South Padre RV Resort** (✆ **800/867-2373** or 956/761-5665; www.destinationsouthpadre.com), just south of the Queen Isabella Causeway on Padre Boulevard. It offers 190 gravel sites with full hookups, restrooms with showers, guest laundry, and security. There's a large heated pool, spa, boat dock, rec hall and game room, and numerous planned activities. Rates are $30 to $39. There are pet restrictions, and tents are not allowed.

## WHERE TO DINE

If you're staying in a condo with a kitchen, and you have many mouths to feed, you'll be going to the grocery store in Port Isabel. Also, you'll find that Zeste, listed below, is a great resource for packaged foods not found anywhere else near here.

**Dirty Al's** ★ (Value) SEAFOOD Al has been a fixture here for 20 years. Most of that time he was running a bait shop and serving tacos on the side just to fishermen. Now, his restaurant is what keeps him busy. The main attractions are the fried shrimp baskets, the stuffed crabs, the blackened fish, and the fried oyster baskets. Al fries up the best shrimp on the island here. And his prices are rock bottom. The restaurant/bait shop is beside the marina (which is south of the bridge). Picnic tables are scattered out in front for people to sit down while they wait for their name to be called (this place is crowded for dinner). Al has opened a second-story dining room. It helps with the wait for a table, but not the crowded parking lot. Dirty Al's might be moving locations in the next year, so ask around.

1 Padre Blvd. ✆ **956/761-4901.** Reservations accepted for parties of 6 or more. Main courses $8–$12. MC, V. Daily 11am–8pm.

**Padre Island Brewing Company** PUB GRUB Brewpub fare (and some pretty decent beer too) makes Padre Island Brewing Company a popular place. The cooked-to-order burgers and sandwiches, such as the chicken fajita served on a French roll, are the surest things. Entrees include steaks, baby back ribs, Texas quail, stuffed chicken breast, crab-stuffed flounder, and breaded beer-batter shrimp. Eat outside on the second-story deck for terrific views, or inside, with a view of the brewing vats.

3400 Padre Blvd., at Bahama St. ✆ **956/761-9585.** Main courses $7–$19. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11:30am–10:30pm; Mon 5–10:30pm.

**Ted's Restaurant** (Value) AMERICAN For breakfast or lunch, this homey establishment in a converted house offers decent food for a good price. The food is mostly the usual stuff for Texas. Breakfast dishes include eggs, pancakes, waffles, and *migas* (scrambled eggs with onions, tomatoes, chiles, cheese, and tortilla strips). The #4 breakfast (fajitas and eggs) is the local favorite. For lunch you can choose from fajitas, burgers, sandwiches, and salads. The staff takes pride in their fajitas. The tuna-and-avocado sandwich isn't bad either.

5717 Padre Blvd. ✆ **956/761-5327.** Main courses $5–$8. MC, V. Daily 7am–2:30pm.

**Zeste** ★ (Finds) DELI/GOURMET TAKEOUT This specialty market is an ideal addition to South Padre Island's dining options, and is positively heaven-sent for the condo renter in need of greater takeout options. Walking through the door, you're immediately in the mood for food when your nose catches a whiff of herbs and fresh-baked bread from the kitchen. Go to the food case and pick your entree and two sides, uncork a bottle, and dine at leisure in the market's pleasant but small dining area, or take it all

to go. The daily menu varies but usually offers Italian and Mediterranean entrees, as well as something like an herb-roasted chicken or tenderloin, and vegetarian options (excellent appetizers, sides, soups, and desserts, too). You can order an entire picnic. The market section sells specialty foods, olives, wines, imported beers, coffees, and gourmet packaged foods. On Friday nights Zeste offers tapas, and occasionally on Thursday nights the owners offer wine tastings.

3508 Padre Blvd. ✆ **956/761-5555.** Plates $9–$15. AE, DISC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 11am–8pm. Extended summer and weekend hours.

## AFTER DARK (OR PERHAPS AFTER NOON)

Not far away are two places that have ample deck space above the water. **Louie's Backyard,** 2305 Laguna Blvd. (✆ **956/716-6406**), is a large and popular establishment serving American food and operating a full bar. During high season, they have live music nightly. **Wahoo Saloon,** 201 W. Pike St. (✆ **956/761-5344**), is smaller and simpler. On Fridays during the summer, the city puts on a small fireworks show after dark, which can be enjoyed from any of these places.

When in need of a proper beach bar where you can work your toes into the sand while enjoying a cold beer, cross to the ocean side of the island and head to **Wanna-Wanna,** at the Island Inn motel, 5100 Gulf Blvd. (✆ **956/761-7677**).

8

# San Antonio

*by David Baird*

San Antonio, home to the Alamo and the River Walk, has more character than any other big city in Texas. Indeed, it is often lumped together with New Orleans, Boston, and San Francisco as one of America's distinctive cities. And if you're looking for a destination for the whole family, you can't go wrong with San Antonio. It has a downtown area that is attractive and comfortable, a couple of large theme parks—SeaWorld and Fiesta Texas—and resorts that cater specifically to families.

For most of its history, San Antonio was the largest city in Texas, the "cosmopolitan" center, where multiple cultures came together and coexisted. In 1718 the native Coahuiltecan Indians were seeking protection from Apache raids, and invited the Spaniards to establish a mission here. A few years later, by order of the king of Spain, 15 families came from the Canary Islands to settle here. (The oldest families in San Antonio can trace their family tree back to these colonists.) The settlement grew and prospered. The church eventually built five missions along the San Antonio River. But during the fight for Mexican Independence and then Texan Independence (1821 and 1836, respectively), San Antonio was the site of several hard-fought battles, including the famous siege of the Alamo. This greatly reduced the population for more than a decade until it began to attract thousands of German settlers fleeing the revolutions in Europe. So many were to come that by 1860, German speakers in the city outnumbered both Spanish and English speakers. Throughout the following decades, these different immigrant groups would accommodate each other and forge a unique local culture.

The city continued to grow. In the early 1900s, it showcased the first skyscraper in Texas. But San Antonio wasn't growing fast enough to keep up with Houston or Dallas. By the 1920s, it had become Texas's third-largest city and had arrived at a crossroads. Was it to follow Houston and Dallas in their bull rush toward growth and modernism? Or was it to go its own way, preserving what it thought most valuable?

This crossroads manifested itself in the form of a political dispute over the meandering San Antonio River. A city commission recommended draining the riverbed and channeling the water through underground culverts to free up space for more downtown buildings. This outraged many locals. A group of women's clubs formed to save the river and create an urban green space along its banks. (And this was decades before anyone in Texas had ever heard of urban planning.) The women's campaign was multipronged and even included a puppet-show dramatization. They were victorious, and the rest, as they say, is history. The Paseo del Rio or River Walk eventually became the city's crowning feature and a point of local pride. It has contributed greatly to the dynamism of the downtown area and the city at large.

There is a richness in San Antonio that goes beyond the images often seen on the covers of guides and brochures. Visitors encounter a city with a strong sense of its own identity, a city whose downtown shows its age and its respect for the past.

# 1 ORIENTATION

## ARRIVING

**BY PLANE** The **San Antonio International Airport** (airport code SAT; ✆ **210/207-3411;** www.ci.sat.tx.us/aviation) is 7 miles north of downtown. It is compact, clean, and well marked, and has two terminals.

**Getting To & From the Airport** Loop 410 and U.S. 281 south intersect just outside the airport. If you're renting a car here, it should take about 15 to 20 minutes to drive downtown via U.S. 281 south.

Most of the hotels within a radius of a mile or two offer **free shuttle service** to and from the airport (be sure to check when you make your reservation). If you're staying downtown, you'll most likely have to pay your own way.

**VIA Metropolitan Transit's bus no. 5** is the cheapest ($1.10) way to get downtown but also the slowest; it'll take from 40 to 45 minutes.

**SATRANS** (✆ **800/868-7707** or 210/281-9900; www.saairportshuttle.com), with a booth outside each of the terminals, offers shared van service from the airport to the downtown hotels for $18 per person one-way, $32 round-trip. Vans run from about 7am until 1am; phone 24 hours in advance for van pickup from your hotel.

There's a **taxi** queue in front of each terminal. Airport taxis charge about $30 to get downtown.

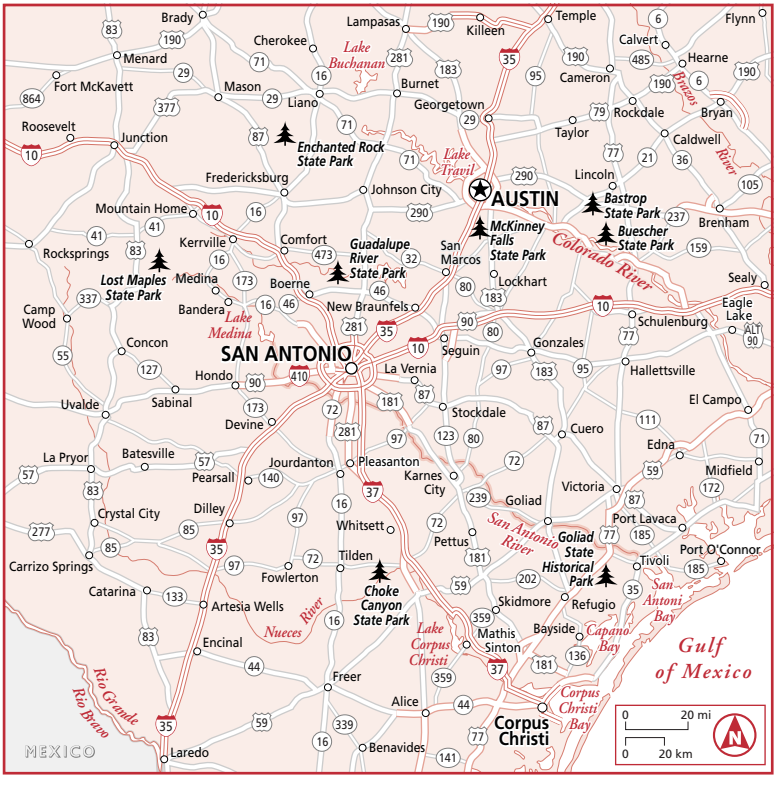
**BY TRAIN** San Antonio's train station is located at 350 Hoefgen St., in St. Paul's Square, on the east side of downtown near the Alamodome and adjacent to the Sunset Station entertainment complex. Cabs are readily available from here. Lockers are not available, but Amtrak will hold passengers' bags in a secure location for $2 per bag. Information about the city is available at the main counter.

**BY BUS** San Antonio's bustling **Greyhound** station, 500 N. St. Mary's St. (✆ **210/270-5834**), is located downtown about 2 blocks from the River Walk. The station, open 24 hours, is within walking distance of a number of hotels, and many public streetcar and bus lines run nearby.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

The main office of the **City of San Antonio Visitor Information Center** is across the street from the Alamo, at 317 Alamo Plaza (✆ **800/252-6609** or 210/207-6748). Hours are daily 9am to 5pm, except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's, when the center is closed. Its website can be helpful, too: www.visitsanantonio.com.

The center offers visitors a free copy of the magazine *San Antonio Travel and Leisure Guide,* published semiannually by the **San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau (SACVB).** It has maps and listings and is something you can pore over during an idle moment. Also at the center are racks and racks of brochures that you can look through and some free magazines heavy on advertisements, such as ***Fiesta,*** with interesting articles about the city, and ***Rio,*** a tabloid focusing on the River Walk. You can find these last two publications at many of the downtown hotels and shops. Both list sights, restaurants, shops, cultural events, and some nightlife, though there's an obvious bias toward advertisers.




Also fr ee—but mor e objectiv e—is S an Antonio 's alternativ e paper , the ***Current.*** Though skimpy, it is a good source for nightlife listings. The ***San Antonio Express-News*** is the local newspaper. It's got a good arts/entertainment section called "The Weekender," which comes out on Friday and is available around town.

## CITY LAYOUT

San Antonio lies at the southern edge of the Texas Hill Country and is mostly flat. Streets, especially those in the old par ts of town, are jumbled, while a number of the thor oughfares leading in and out of to wn follow old Spanish trails or 19th-century wagon trails.

**MAIN ARTERIES & STREETS** Most of the major roads in Texas meet in San Antonio, where they form a r ough wheel-and-spoke pattern. There are two loops: I-410 cir cles around the city, coming to within 6 to 7 miles of do wntown in the nor th and east, and as far out as 10 miles in the w est and south; and Hwy. 1604 forms an ev en larger circle with a 13-mile radius. The spokes of the wheel are formed by highways I-35, I-10, I-37, U.S. 281, U.S. 90, and U.S. 87. Occasionally, two or three highways will merge onto the

same freeway. For example, U.S. 90, U.S. 87, and I-10 converge for a while in an east-west direction just south of downtown, while U.S. 281, I-35, and I-37 run together on a north-south route to the east; I-10, I-35, and U.S. 87 bond for a bit going north-south to the west of downtown.

Among the most major of the minor spokes are Broadway, McCullough, San Pedro, and Blanco, all of which lead north from the city center into the most popular shopping and restaurant areas of town. Fredericksburg goes out to the Medical Center from just northwest of downtown. You may hear locals referring to something as being "in the loop." That doesn't mean it's privy to insider information, but rather, that it lies within the circumference of I-410, and is therefore in central San Antonio.

Downtown is bounded by I-37 to the east, I-35 to the north and west, and U.S. 90 (which merges with I-10) to the south. Within this area, Durango, Commerce, Market, and Houston are the important east-west streets. Alamo on the east side and Santa Rosa (which turns into South Laredo) on the west side are the major north-south streets.

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

The older areas described here, from downtown through Alamo Heights, are all "in the loop" (410). The Medical Center area in the Northwest lies just outside it, but the rest of the Northwest, as well as North Central and the West, are expanding beyond even Loop 1604.

**Downtown** Site of San Antonio's original Spanish settlements, this area includes the Alamo and other historic sites, along with the River Walk, the Alamodome, the convention center, the Rivercenter Mall, and many high-rise hotels, restaurants, and shops. It's also the center of commerce and government, so many banks and offices, as well as most city buildings, are located here. Downtown is fun and vibrant. The River Walk is the centerpiece, but there's a lot more that can be seen and appreciated that takes a bit of exploring.

**King William** The city's first suburb, this historic district directly south of downtown was settled in the mid- to late 1800s by wealthy German merchants who built some of the most beautiful mansions in town. It began to be yuppified in the 1970s, and, at this point, you'd never guess it had ever been allowed to deteriorate. Only two of the area's many impeccably restored homes are generally open to the public, but a number have been turned into bed-and-breakfasts. As you can imagine, the location is ideal for those who want to explore the central city.

**Southtown** Alamo Street marks the border between King William and Southtown, an adjoining commercial district. Long a depressed area, it's slowly becoming trendy thanks to a Main Street refurbishing project and the opening of the Blue Star arts complex. You'll find a nice mix of Hispanic neighborhood shops and funky coffeehouses and galleries here, but few hotels worth staying in.

**South Side** The old, largely Hispanic southeast section of town that begins where Southtown ends (there's no agreed-upon boundary, but I'd say it lies a few blocks beyond the Blue Star arts complex) is home to four of the city's five historic missions. Thus far, it hasn't been experiencing the same gentrification and redevelopment as much of the rest of the city—but that could change when the hike-and-bike trail along a stretch of the San Antonio River here is completed.

**Monte Vista Area** Immediately north of downtown, Monte Vista was established soon after King William by a conglomeration of wealthy cattlemen, politicos, and generals who moved "on to the hill" at the turn of the 20th century. A number of the area's large houses have been split into apartments for students of nearby Trinity University and San Antonio Community College, but many lovely old homes have been restored in the past 30 years. It hasn't reached King William status yet, but this is already a highly desirable (read: pricey) place to live. Monte Vista is close to the once thriving, but now less lively, restaurant and entertainment district along North St. Mary's Street between Josephine and Magnolia known locally as the **Strip.**

**Fort Sam Houston** Built in 1876 to the northeast of downtown, Fort Sam Houston boasts a number of stunning officers' homes. Much of the working-class neighborhood surrounding Fort Sam is run-down, but renewed interest in restoring San Antonio's older areas is beginning to have some impact here too.

**Alamo Heights Area** In the 1890s, when construction in the area began, Alamo Heights was at the far northern reaches of San Antonio. This is now home to San Antonio's well-heeled residents and holds most of the fashionable shops and restaurants. **Terrell Hills** to the east, **Olmos Park** to the west, and **Lincoln Heights** to the north are all offshoots of this area. The latter is home to the Quarry, once just that, but now a ritzy golf course and popular shopping mall. Shops and restaurants are concentrated along two main drags: Broadway and, to a lesser degree, New Braunfels. Most of these neighborhoods share a single zip code ending in the numbers "09"—thus the local term "09ers," referring to the area's affluent residents. The Witte Museum, San Antonio Botanical Gardens, and Brackenridge Park are all here.

**Northwest** These mostly characterless neighborhoods surround the South Texas Medical Center (a large grouping of healthcare facilities referred to as the **Medical Center**). The area includes lots of condominiums and apartments, and much of the shopping and dining is in strip malls (the trendy, still-expanding Huebner Oaks retail center is an exception). The farther north you go, the nicer the housing complexes get. The high-end Westin La Cantera resort, the exclusive La Cantera and Dominion residential enclave, several tony golf courses, and the Shops at La Cantera, San Antonio's fanciest new retail center, mark the direction that development is taking in the far northwest part of town, just beyond Six Flags Fiesta Texas and near the public Friedrich Park. It's becoming one of San Antonio's prime growth areas.

**North Central** San Antonio is inching toward Bulverde and other Hill Country towns via this major corridor of development clustered from Loop 410 north to Loop 1604, east of I-10 and west of I-35, and bisected by U.S. 281. The airport and many developed industrial strips line U.S. 281 in the southern section, but the farther north you go, the more you see the natural beauty of this area, hilly and dotted with small canyons. Recent city codes have motivated developers to retain trees and native plants in their residential communities.

**West** Although SeaWorld has been out here since the late 1980s, and the Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort settled here in the early 1990s, other development was comparatively slow in

coming. Now the West is booming with new midprice housing dev elopments, strip malls, schools, and businesses. Road building hasn 't kept pace with growth, ho wever, so traffic can be a bear.

## 2 GETTING AROUND

If you're staying downtown, a car is more of a hindrance than an asset: Traffic and parking are a pain, and public transportation is good. If you're bunking anywhere else in San Antonio, however, you'll definitely want wheels—and you might as well rent them at the airport, where all the major car-r ental companies ar e represented at each of the terminals.

### BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

**BY BUS** **VIA Metropolitan Transit Service** offers regular bus service for $1.10, with an additional 15¢ charge for transfers. E xpress buses cost $2. You'll need exact change. Call ✆ **210/362-2020** for transit information, check the website at **www.viainfo.net**, or stop in one of VIA's many service centers. The most convenient for visitors is the downtown center, 260 E. Houston St., open Monday to Friday 7am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 2pm. A helpful bus route is the no. 7, which travels from downtown to the San Antonio Museum of Art, Japanese Tea Garden, San Antonio Zoo, Witte Museum, Brackenridge Park, and the Botanical G arden. ***Tip:*** During large festivals such as Fiesta and the Texas Folklife Festival, VIA offers many Park & Ride lots that allow you to leave your car and bus it downtown.

**BY STREETCAR** In addition to its bus lines, VIA offers four conv enient downtown streetcar routes that co ver all the most popular tourist stops. The streetcars cost $1.10 (exact change r equired; drivers carry none). The trolleys, which hav e signs color-coded by route, display their destinations.

### BY CAR

If you can avoid driving downtown, by all means do so . The pattern of one-way str eets is confusing and par king is extremely limited. It's not that the str eets in downtown San Antonio are narrower or more crowded than those in most old city centers, but it 's that there's no need to bother when public transpor tation is so convenient.

Rush hour lasts fr om about 7:30 to 9am and 4:30 to 6pm M onday through Friday. The cr ush may not be bad compar ed with that of H ouston or D allas, but it 's getting worse. Because of San Antonio's rapid growth, you can also expect to find major highway construction or r epairs going on some where in the city at any giv en time. F or updates, log on to the Texas Department of Transportation's website at **www.dot.state.tx.us**.

**PARKING** There are plenty of parking lots scattered around the north and east sides of downtown, within a fe w blocks of the main attractions. These run about $5 to $7 per day. Parking meters are not plentiful in the hear t of do wntown, but you can find some on the str eets near the Riv er Walk and on B roadway. The cost is $1 per hour (which is also the time limit) near the courthouse, 75¢ in other locations. There are some inexpensive (2 hr. for $1) meters at the outskir ts of do wntown. ***Note:*** Although v ery few signs inform you of this fact, par king at meters is fr ee after 6pm M onday through Saturday and free all day Sunday except during special events.

## BY RIVER TAXI

**Rio Taxi Service** (✆ **800/417-4139** or 210/244-5700; www.riosanantonio.com) operates daily from 9am to 9pm. Its 39 pickup locations are marked by Rio Taxi signs with black-and-yellow checker flags. You buy your tickets once you board. At $4 one-way, $10 for an all-day pass, or $25 for a 3-day pass, it's more expensive than ground transport, but it's a treat.

## BY TAXI

Cabs are available outside the airport, near the Greyhound and Amtrak terminals (only when a train is due, however), and at most major downtown hotels, but they're next to impossible to hail on the street; most of the time, you'll need to phone for one in advance. The best of the taxi companies in town (and also the largest, because it represents the consolidation of two of the majors) is **Yellow-Checker Cab** (✆ **210/222-2222**), which has an excellent record of turning up when promised. The base charge on a taxi is $2; add $2.15 for each mile.

### *Fast Facts* San Antonio

***American Express*** The office is located at 9000 Wurzbach Rd. (✆ **210/593-0084**).

***Dentist*** To find a dentist near you in town, contact the San Antonio District Dental Society, 3355 Cherry Ridge, Ste. 214 (✆ **210/732-1264**).

***Doctor*** For a referral, contact the Bexar County Medical Society at 6243 W. IH-10, Ste. 600 (✆ **210/301-4368;** www.bcms.org), Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm.

***Drugstores*** Most branches of CVS (formerly Eckerd) and Walgreens, the major chain pharmacies in San Antonio, are open late Monday through Saturday. There's a CVS downtown at 211 Losoya/River Walk (✆ **210/224-9293**). Call ✆ **800/925-4733** to find the Walgreens nearest you; punch in the area code and the first three digits of the number you're phoning from and you'll be directed to the closest branch.

***Hospitals*** The main downtown hospital is Baptist Medical Center, 111 Dallas St. (✆ **210/297-7000**). Christus Santa Rosa Health Care Corp., 333 N. Santa Rosa St. (✆ **210/704-2011**), is also downtown. Contact the San Antonio Medical Foundation (✆ **210/614-3724**) for information about other medical facilities in the city.

***Hot Lines*** Contact the National Youth Crisis Hot Line at ✆ **800/448-4663;** Rape Crisis Hot Line at ✆ **210/349-7273;** Child Abuse Hot Line at ✆ **800/252-5400;** Mental Illness Crisis Hot Line at ✆ **210/227-4357;** Bexar County Adult Abuse Hot Line at ✆ **800/252-5400;** and Poison Control Center at ✆ **800/764-7661.**

***Newspapers & Magazines*** The *San Antonio Express-News* is the only mainstream source of news in town. See "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter, for magazine recommendations.

***Police*** Call ✆ **911** in an emergency. The nonemergency number is ✆ **311.** The Texas Highway Patrol can be reached at ✆ **210/531-2220.**

***Safety*** The crime rate in San Antonio has gone down in recent years, and there's a strong police presence downtown (in fact, both the transit authority and the police department have bicycle patrols); as a result, muggings, pickpocketings, and purse snatchings in the area are rare. Still, use common sense as you would anywhere else: Walk only in well-lit, well-populated streets. Also, it's generally not a good idea to stroll south of Durango Avenue after dark.

***Taxes*** The sales tax here is 8.25%, and the city surcharge on hotel rooms increases to a whopping 16.75%.

## 3 WHERE TO STAY

San Antonio has the greatest number of historic hotels of any city in Texas. There are a number to choose from. Even low-end hotel chains are reclaiming old buildings—many examples are covered in this chapter—so don't judge a place only by its affiliation. All of these, as well as most of the newer luxury accommodations, are in the downtown area, which is where you'll likely want to be whether you're here for pleasure or business. Prices in this prime location tend to be high, especially for hotels on the river. And if you're willing to forgo your own wheels for a bit, you'll economize by eliminating car-rental and parking fees. Most of the tourist attractions are within walking distance or are accessible by efficient and inexpensive public transportation, and many restaurants favored by locals are within a short cab ride from downtown.

A number of the old mansions in the King William and Monte Vista historic districts—both close to downtown—have been converted into bed-and-breakfasts; several of them are reviewed in this chapter. Staying in King William has been made more attractive for walkers by the recent extension of the River Walk all the way to this neighborhood. For information about additional bed-and-breakfasts around the city, check out www.sanantoniobb.org, the website of the **San Antonio Bed & Breakfast Association.** Several of San Antonio's inns can also be booked via **Historic Accommodations of Texas,** P.O. Box 203, Vanderpool, TX 78885 (✆ **800/HAT-0368** [428-0368]; www.hat.org).

Expect most downtown hotels to fall into the Very Expensive or Expensive range, especially if they sit right on the river. With a few notable exceptions, detailed below, only chain hotels on the outskirts of downtown tend to be Moderate or Inexpensive. You'll do better to stay in a B&B in a historic area near downtown, so you won't have to give up many amenities. Although they're not formally called concierges, B&B owners and innkeepers also do far more to guide their guests around town than employees given that title in many large city hotels. You can also expect B&Bs to provide fax and other business services, and these days most offer high-speed and/or wireless Internet connections.

With a few other exceptions, detailed here, the vast majority of the other lodgings around town are low-priced chains. The most convenient are clustered in the northwest near the Medical Center and in the North Central area, around the airport. For a full alphabetical listing of the accommodations in the city mapped by area and including rate ranges as well as basic amenities, phone the **San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau** (✆ **800/447-3372**) and request a lodging guide. The "Accommodations" section of **www.visitsanantonio.com** is also a good resource.

Wherever you decide to stay, try to book as far in advance as possible—especially if the property is located downtown. And don't even think about coming to town during Fiesta (the third week in Apr) if you haven't reserved a room 6 months in advance.

In the following reviews, price categories are based on rates for a double room in high season, and don't factor in the 16.75% room tax. Often, rates will be a little higher for Fiesta.

## DOWNTOWN

### Very Expensive

**Hotel Contessa ★★** This is the newest hotel on the river, and its location makes you wonder why someone waited for so long to build here. Fronting the property is a massive cypress tree crowning a small circle of land that juts out into the river. The building is attractive. The architecture follows what is by now a familiar model—rooms surrounding a soaring atrium. Glass elevators take you up the 12 stories to the rooms, all of them suites. The first thing you see upon entering a suite is a sitting room of good size. It's furnished in more traditional style than the common areas of the hotel, with Southwestern accents. Both the furniture and the lighting are more comfortable than most of the hotels in this category. The bathroom is attractive and ample, but nothing special for this category of hotel. The next door leads to the bedroom, which comes with either a river or a city view. The best river views are down low, level with the cypress trees, and the best city views are up high. All rooms are nonsmoking. Each comes with either a king-size or two double beds.

Hotel operations are handled by Benchmark, which in my experience does a commendable job at providing services and running properties. But this could change—new hotels often will hire a professional management company until they feel capable of running the place. Also highly changeable are the rates and policies, which are always fluid during the first 2 years of a hotel's existence. But, all things remaining the same, I prefer staying here to the Westin, next door, depending largely on the rates.

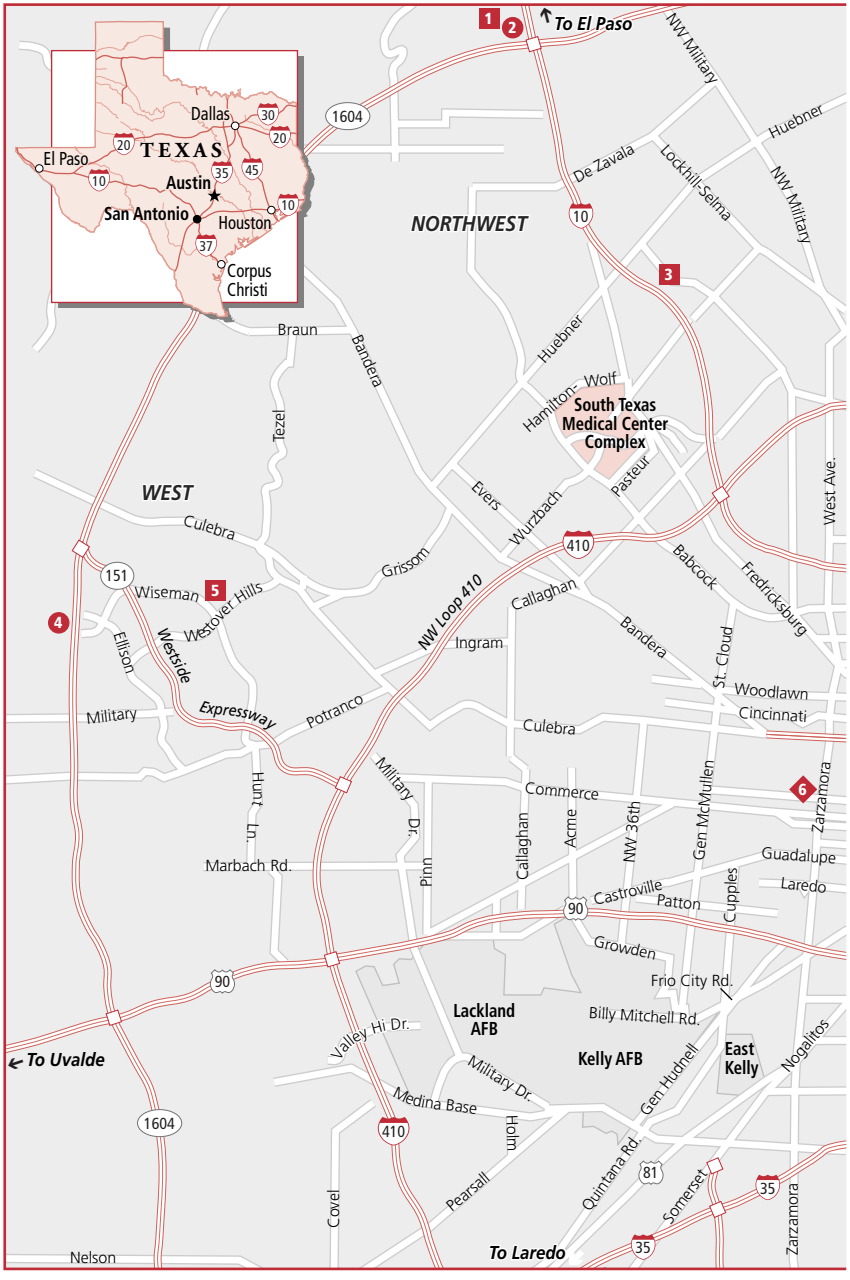
306 W. Market St. (at Navarro), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **866/435-0900** or 210/229-9222. Fax 210/229-9228. www.thehotelcontessa.com. 265 units. $219–$289 suite; executive suites from $339. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor heated pool; gym; spa; Jacuzzi; concierge; business center; room service until 10pm; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

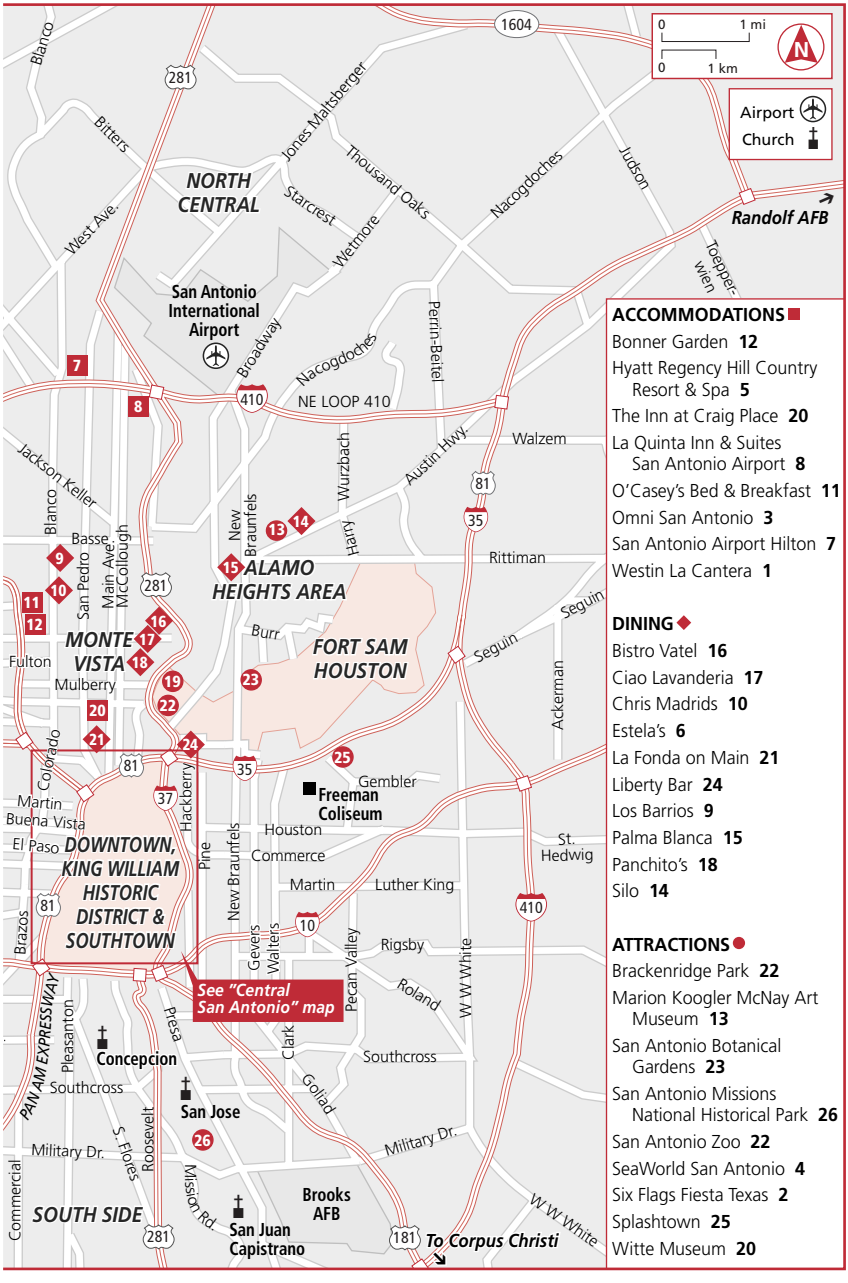
**Hotel Valencia Riverwalk** The Valencia is considered one of the hippest hotels on the River Walk. The rooms are superchic—lots of contrasts, retro lamps, and tongue-in-cheek touches, such as the faux mink throw on the bed—and very techie-friendly. The on-site **Vbar** and **Citrus** restaurants are übertrendy, and the panoply of colors and sounds (a splashing waterfall, music wafting through the halls) that you encounter as you enter the hotel is stimulating. But the entryway, on a busy street with a limited area for luggage (or vehicle) drop-off, is a tad *too* stimulating, whether or not the remote Palm Pilot check-in is in operation. The hallways leading to the guest quarters are narrow and dark, and the rooms themselves have too many individual dimmer switches and lighting devices, and not enough space. The priciest rooms offer river views from narrow balconies. If you're looking for something bold, new, and different, the Valencia is a great choice. But if you're regular folk just seeking a stress-free getaway, look elsewhere.

150 E. Houston St. (at St. Mary's), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **866/842-0100** or 210/227-9700. Fax 210/227-9701. www.hotelvalencia.com. 213 units. $189–$289 double; suites from $450. Leisure, corporate, and Internet rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $27. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; exercise room; spa; concierge; business center; Wi-Fi in public areas; 24-hr. room service; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, high-speed Internet access, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

# Greater San Antonio Accommodations, Dining & Attractions








**ACCOMMODATIONS ■**

- Bonner Garden **12**
- Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort & Spa **5**
- The Inn at Craig Place **20**
- La Quinta Inn & Suites San Antonio Airport **8**
- O'Casey's Bed & Breakfast **11**
- Omni San Antonio **3**
- San Antonio Airport Hilton **7**
- Westin La Cantera **1**

**DINING ◆**

- Bistro Vatel **16**
- Ciao Lavanderia **17**
- Chris Madrids **10**
- Estela's **6**
- La Fonda on Main **21**
- Liberty Bar **24**
- Los Barrios **9**
- Palma Blanca **15**
- Panchito's **18**
- Silo **14**

**ATTRACTIONS ●**

- Brackenridge Park **22**
- Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum **13**
- San Antonio Botanical Gardens **23**
- San Antonio Missions National Historical Park **26**
- San Antonio Zoo **22**
- SeaWorld San Antonio **4**
- Six Flags Fiesta Texas **2**
- Splashtown **25**
- Witte Museum **20**

**Omni La Mansión del Río ★★** This hotel is pure San Antonio and is the favorite choice of Texan out-of-towners. The core of the building was constructed in 1852 for a seminary, and renovations and expansions have kept the character of the original. Rooms have local flavor, with many featuring Mexican tile floors, beamed ceilings, and wrought-iron balconies. Unlike many of the other big hotels on the river, this one is not a high-rise (six floors). Rooms with a river view are level with the tall cypress trees that line the riverbank, and the hotel's location on a central, yet relatively quiet, section of the River Walk is ideal (it provides complimentary transportation around the downtown business district). Interior rooms are also enjoyable, looking out, as they do, over landscaped courtyards. Since the Omni chain took over management in 2006, all the rooms have been remodeled. Most are large and are decorated with highly textured plush fabrics to set off the rustic elements of the room.

Guests can use the health club and spa at the hotel's sister property, the Watermark (see below). It's just across the river. The hotel's dining room, **Las Canarias,** serves up its excellent American cuisine accompanied with a terrific view of the river.

112 College St. (btw. St. Mary's and Navarro), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **800/830-1400** or 210/518-1000. Fax 210/226-0389. www.omnilamansion.com. 337 units. $229–$429 double; suites from $1,039. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $28. Pets under 20 lb. accepted for $25 per pet per day. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor heated pool; fitness room; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet cable, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**The Watermark Hotel & Spa ★★★** This is the most luxurious of the River Walk hotel properties. The welcoming Western-style lobby pays tribute to the historic L. Frank Saddlery Building, which once occupied this site. The rooms are some of the nicest in San Antonio. Bright, with high ceilings, they've got a Texas-meets-Tokyo elegance, their leather and wrought-iron accents balanced by a Zen-like sea-foam green and off-white color scheme; the marble bathrooms offer jetted tubs. And, outside of the resorts on the outskirts of town, this hotel has the city's best spa and beauty salon—not to mention **Pesca,** arguably San Antonio's premier seafood restaurant.

And that's not even getting into the service. There will be no stressful encounters with the front desk when you arrive. Instead, you're escorted to your room—where your minifridge has been stocked with goodies that you requested in advance—to complete the check-in process. With the spa, the soothing guest quarters, and the staff attentiveness, this is a comfortable, relaxing hotel. It is also completely nonsmoking.

212 W. Crockett St. (at St. Mary's), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **866/605-1212** or 210/396-5800. Fax 210/226-0389. www.watermarkhotel.com. 99 units. $319–$469 double; $939 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $28. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; outdoor pool; whirlpool; health club; spa; concierge; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access, minifridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## Expensive

**Emily Morgan ★★** (Value) This hotel is 2 blocks from the River Walk, on the north side of the Alamo. It's in a tall, classic skyscraper built in the 1920s, when architects didn't shy away from exuberance and had large budgets for architectural detail. The style is heavily Gothic, which makes it one of the most easily recognized landmarks in San Antonio. Many of the rooms have excellent views of the Alamo and its grounds. The furnishings are contemporary and plush and aren't so numerous as to clutter the rooms with things such as ottomans and occasional chairs. Sliding doors to the bathroom add to the uncluttered look. These features lend the rooms a clean, up-to-date look. A nod to romance is provided by votive candles and a CD player. This place is considerably less

# Central San Antonio Accommodations, Dining & Attractions

expensive than many comparable hotels on the river, and its combination of style, luxury, and history is hard to beat. The hotel has a very liberal pet policy and even includes cat and dog treats on the room-service menu. Smoking is not permitted in any of the guest rooms.

705 E. Houston St. (at Ave. E), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **800/824-6674** or 210/225-5100. Fax 210/225-7227. www.emilymorganhotel.com. 177 units. $169–$269 double; $229–$279 suite. Corporate, promotional rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $26. Pets permitted with $75 fee. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor heated pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; Wi-Fi in public areas; 24-hr. room service; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, CD player, Wi-Fi, minifridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Menger Hotel ★** In the late 19th century, no one who was any one would consider staying anywhere but the Menger, which opened its doors in 1859 and has never closed them. Ulysses S. Grant, Sarah Bernhardt, and Oscar Wilde were among those who walked—or, rumor has it, in the case of Robert E. Lee, rode a horse—through the halls, ballrooms, and gardens. Successfully combining the original, restored building with myriad additions, the Menger now takes up an entire city block. The hotel's location is terrific—smack between the Alamo and the Rivercenter Mall, a block from the River Walk. And its public areas, particularly the Victorian Lobby, are gorgeous. The **Menger Bar** (see "San Antonio After Dark," later in this chapter) is one of San Antonio's historic taverns, and while nearly every historic hotel in town promotes a ghost, this one claims to have no fewer than 32. The Menger also has a small spa, still a relative rarity in San Antonio hotels. Ask for one of the recently refurbished rooms, as those that haven't been redone are somewhat tired. Decor ranges from ornate 19th-century to modern. If you want one of the antiques-filled Victorian rooms, be sure to request it when you book. All rooms are nonsmoking.

204 Alamo Plaza (at Crockett St.), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **800/345-9285** or 210/223-4361. Fax 210/228-0022. www.historicmenger.com. 316 units. $159–$229 double; $250–$495 suite. Internet specials sometimes available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; fitness room; spa; Jacuzzi; shopping arcade; limited room service; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access, hair dryer, iron.

## Moderate

**Comfort Inn Alamo/Riverwalk San Antonio** Value This hotel is nothing like most of the properties in the chain. First and foremost, it occupies the old Bexar (pronounced *bear*) County Jail, and is a regular hotel with indoor corridors and a front desk at the entrance. But what impressed me about the place was the cleanliness and the comfort of the rooms. The bathrooms were also a surprise—a little larger and much more attractive than the usual at this price level, with such touches as polished granite countertops. The largest rooms come with two queen-size beds, and are quite comfortable. Other options are a king-size bed and the studio king. All rooms are nonsmoking. Service here is friendly and attentive.

In the past couple of years it has become popular with repeat visitors to San Antonio, but you can still occasionally get a deal. Being under the Comfort Inn label, you might find this property discounted by some of the hotel room vendors. The location is good, in the western part of downtown San Antonio, about 3 blocks from the River Walk.

120 Camaron St. (btw. Houston and Commerce), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **800/223-4990** or 210/281-1400. Fax 210/228-0007. www.comfortinnsanantonio.com. 82 units. $120–$189 double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Off-site parking (1 block away). **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; Jacuzzi; business center; coin-op washer/dryer; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Crockett Hotel** ★ (Value) This property is a bit of a hybrid, consisting of the original historical landmark building (expanded in 1927) and several low-slung, motel-style units that surround what may be downtown's nicest swimming pool and a tropical landscaped courtyard. Rooms in both sections of the hotel are attractive, with lots of vibrant Southwest colors and allusions to Texas history (regional artwork, pine beds with Lone Star headboards, and the like). Look for deals; rooms here are discounted for every imaginable reason. The location is excellent, by the Alamo and the Rivercenter Mall and close by the river.

320 Bonham St. (at Crockett St.), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **800/292-1050** or 210/225-6500. Fax 210/225-7418. www.crockethotel.com. 204 units. $139–$157 double; suites from $375. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. Pets accepted; $100 deposit required ($50 refundable). **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; unheated outdoor pool and hot tub; limited room service; coin-op laundry; same-day dry cleaning (weekdays). *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Drury Inn & Suites San Antonio Riverwalk** (Value) One of San Antonio's most recent River Walk conversions, the one-time Petroleum Commerce Building is now a comfortable modern lodging. The polished marble floors and chandeliers in the lobby and the high ceilings and ornate window treatments in the guest rooms hearken back to a grander era, also evoked in business-traveler perks such as free hot breakfasts, free evening cocktails and snacks, free local phone calls, and 1 hour of free long-distance per day. Guests also appreciate the 24-hour business center. Anyone who wants to economize on meals will also like the fact that many of these attractive Southwest-style rooms are equipped with refrigerators and microwaves.

201 N. St. Mary's St. (at Commerce St.), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **800/DRURY-INN** (378-7946) or 210/212-5200. Fax 210/352-9939. www.druryhotels.com. 150 units. $129–$164 double; $164–$199 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking $14. Small pets accepted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; 24-hr. business center; Wi-Fi in public areas; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge and microwave (in king rooms and suites), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Havana Riverwalk Inn** ★ Decked out to suggest travelers' lodgings from the 1920s, this intimate inn—built in 1914 in Mediterranean Revival style—oozes character. All the guest quarters are delightfully different, with a safari hat covering a temperature control gauge here, an old photograph perched over a toilet paper roll there, gauzy curtains draped on a canopy bed, wooden louvers on the windows, and so on. Touches such as fresh flowers and bottled water add to the charm, and modern amenities such as irons have not been ignored. Not all rooms have closets, however, so be prepared to have your clothes (ironed or not) hanging in public view if you plan to invite anyone to your room. Singles will absolutely want to hit the hotel's happening cigar bar, **Club Cohiba.** Rooms are nonsmoking.

1015 Navarro (btw. St. Mary's and Martin sts.), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **888/224-2008** or 210/222-2008. Fax 210/222-2717. www.havanariverwalkinn.com. 28 units. $149–$199 double; $399–$599 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking $10. Children 14 and under not accepted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; business center; secretarial services; limited room service; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, hair dryer, iron.

## Inexpensive

**Best Western Sunset Suites–Riverwalk** ★ (Value) Don't be put off by the fact that this all-suites hotel is located on the wrong side of the tracks, er, highway. In a converted turn-of-the-20th-century building you'll find some of the nicest rooms in downtown San Antonio for the price—large, with custom-made Arts and Crafts–style

furnishings, including comfy, clean-lined lounge chairs and faux Tiffany lamps. They're also some of the best-equipped rooms around: All offer sleeper sofas, microwaves, mini-fridges, and 27-inch TVs. And talk about deals: If you don't want to move your car from its free parking spot or take a 10-minute walk to the heart of downtown, you can ride the public trolley bus that passes by the hotel.

1103 E. Commerce St. (at Hwy. 281), San Antonio, TX 78205. ✆ **866/560-6000** or 210/223-4400. Fax 210/223-4402. www.bestwesternsunsetsuites.com. 64 units. $129 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Health club; business center. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, Wi-Fi, kitchenette, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## KING WILLIAM HISTORIC DISTRICT

### Expensive

**Ogé House Inn on the River Walk ★★** One of the most glorious of the mansions that grace the King William district, this 1857 Greek revival–style property is more of a boutique inn than a bed-and-breakfast. You'll still get the personalized attention you would expect from a host home, but it's combined here with the luxury of a sophisticated small hotel. All rooms are impeccably decorated in high Victorian style, yet feature modern conveniences such as small refrigerators; many rooms also have fireplaces and views of the manicured, pecan-shaded grounds, and one looks out on the river from its own balcony. The units downstairs aren't as light as those on the upper two floors, but they're less expensive and offer private entrances. A bountiful gourmet breakfast is served on individual white-clothed tables set with the finest crystal and china. You'll also find such modern touches as Wi-Fi throughout and high-speed Internet access in the rooms.

209 Washington St. (at Turner St.), San Antonio, TX 78204. ✆ **800/242-2770** or 210/223-2353. Fax 210/226-5812. www.ogeinn.com. 10 units. $189–$229 double; suites from $269. Rates include full breakfast. Corporate rates available for single business travelers. 2-night minimum stay on weekends; 3 nights during holidays and special events. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Wi-Fi in public areas. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, high-speed Internet access, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

### Moderate

**Beckmann Inn and Carriage House** Sitting on the lovely wraparound porch of this 1886 Queen Anne home, surrounded by quiet, tree-lined streets on an underdeveloped stretch of the San Antonio River, you can easily imagine yourself in a kinder, gentler era. In fact, you can still see the flour mill on whose property the Beckmann Inn was originally built. The illusion of time travel won't be dispelled when you step through the rare Texas red-pine door into the high-ceilinged parlor. The house is filled with antique pieces that do justice to the setting, such as the ornately carved Victorian beds in each of the guest rooms. Smoking is prohibited in the rooms, but allowed in outdoor common areas. A full breakfast—perhaps cranberry French toast topped with orange twist—is served in the formal dining room, but you can also enjoy your coffee on a flower-filled sun porch.

222 E. Guenther St. (at Madison St.), San Antonio, TX 78204. ✆ **800/945-1449** or 210/229-1449. Fax 210/229-1061. www.beckmanninn.com. 6 units. $109–$199. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Wi-Fi in public areas. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

**Brackenridge House** Finds These days many B&Bs are beginning to resemble boutique hotels, with an almost hands-off approach on the part of the hosts. If you seek out B&Bs because you prefer warmer, more traditional treatment, this King William

## Kids Family-Friendly Hotels

**Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort & Spa** (p. 272) In addition to its many great play areas (including a beach with a shallow swimming area), and its proximity to SeaWorld, this hotel offers Camp Hyatt—a program of excursions, sports, and social activities for children 3 to 12. The program fills up fast during school breaks and other holidays, when reservations are mandatory.

**O'Casey's Bed & Breakfast** (p. 270) Usually B&Bs and family vacations are a contradiction in terms, but O'Casey's is happy to host well-behaved kids. ***Best bet:*** Stay in the separate guesthouse with the foldout bed, and then join the main-house guests for breakfast in the morning.

**Omni San Antonio** (p. 271) This hotel's proximity to the theme parks, as well as in-room Nintendo and various other Omni Kids features, makes the Omni appealing to families.

**Westin La Cantera** (p. 271) It's close to Six Flags Fiesta Texas, it's got two pools just for children, and it offers the Enchanted Rock Kids Club—an activities program for ages 5 through 12—May through Labor Day.



abode is likely to suit you. It's not just that the house is homey rather than fancy—although it's got its fair share of antiques, you don't feel as though they're too priceless to approach—but that owners Sue and Bennie (aka the King of King William) Blansett instantly make you feel welcome. They also help you find whatever you need, and even provide free trolley passes to get you there. But that's not to say you have to be communal constantly. All rooms have TVs with HBO and Showtime, as well as minifridges, microwaves, and coffeemakers. And if you're really antisocial (or traveling with kids and/or a pet), you can always book the separate carriage house, a few doors down from the main house.

230 Madison St. (off Beauregard St.), San Antonio, TX 78204. ✆ **800/221-1412** or 210/271-3442. www.brackenridgehouse.com. 6 units. $120–$250 double; $150–$275 suites and carriage house. Rates include breakfast (full in main house, continental in carriage house). Corporate, state, and federal rates; extended-stay plans available for the carriage house. 2-night minimum stay required on weekends. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. Small pets accepted in carriage house. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; hot tub; Wi-Fi in public areas. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**King William Manor ★** Guests can stay in the 1892 Greek revival mansion or in an adjacent guesthouse built 9 years later. The mansion is the more opulent and offers unusual walk-through windows leading to a veranda and lots of common areas, which are available to all. The guesthouse—where most of the guest rooms are—affords more variety, including some large rooms. One of the biggest and most private is the cottage attached to the guesthouse.

The owners, native Texan Tim Sulak and Brian Wollard, live on the property in a separate cottage and go out of their way to make people feel at home. They've made extensive changes to this property, which used to be called The Columns on Alamo. An outdoor pool and landscaped grounds are some of the changes. They also refurnished the

guest rooms to make them lighter and more comfortable. They've been working hard, and it shows. The location in the King William area is excellent. Within a few blocks are several restaurants, and just 2 blocks away is an entrance to the river trail, which you can take all the way to the River Walk.

1037 S. Alamo (at Sheridan, 5 blocks south of Durango), San Antonio, TX 78210. ✆ **800/405-0367** or 210/222-0144. www.kingwilliammanor.com. 12 units. $119–$175 double. Rates include full breakfast. 2-day minimum stay. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; Wi-Fi in public areas. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

## MONTE VISTA HISTORIC DISTRICT

### Moderate

**The Inn at Craig Place ★** This 1891 mansion-turned-B&B appeals to history, art, and architecture buffs alike. It was built by one of Texas's most noted architects, Alfred Giles, for H. E. Hildebrand, a major public figure at the time. The living room holds a mural by Julian Onderdonk, an influential Texas landscape artist, who grew up in Monte Vista in the 1880s. But that's all academic. More to the point, this place is gorgeous, with forests of gleaming wood and clean Arts and Crafts lines, as well as cushy couches and a wraparound porch. Rooms are at once luxurious—all have working fireplaces and hardwood floors, and come with robes, slippers, feather pillows, and down comforters—and equipped for modern needs. The inn offers several packages; be sure to check their website.

117 W. Craig Place (off N. Main Ave.), San Antonio, TX 78212. ✆ **877/427-2447** or 210/736-1017. Fax 210/737-1562. www.craigplace.com. 5 units. $125–$199 double; $160–$210 suite. Corporate rates available. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. No children 11 and under. *In room:* A/C, TV w/DVD, Wi-Fi, hair dryer, iron, no phone.

### Inexpensive

**Bonner Garden ★** Value Those who like the charm of the bed-and-breakfast experience but aren't keen on Victorian froufrou should consider the Bonner Garden, located about a mile north of downtown. Built in 1910 for Louisiana artist Mary Bonner, this large, Italianate villa has elegantly appointed rooms that steer clear of the cluttered look. It also has something not commonly found at B&Bs: a large 45-foot swimming pool. The Portico Room, in which guests can gaze up at a painted blue sky with billowing clouds, enjoys a private poolside entrance. You don't have to be honeymooners to enjoy the Jacuzzi tub in the Bridal Suite, perhaps the prettiest room, with its blue porcelain fireplace. Most of the rooms feature European-style decor, but Mary Bonner's former studio, separate from the main house, is done in an attractive Santa Fe style. A rooftop deck affords a sparkling nighttime view of downtown. Smoking is permitted in outdoor areas only.

145 E. Agarita (at McCullough), San Antonio, TX 78212. ✆ **800/396-4222** or 210/733-4222. Fax 210/733-6129. www.bonnergarden.com. 6 units. $115–$165 double. Rates include full breakfast. Extended-stay discount (minimum 3 nights) and corporate rates available. 2-night minimum stay on weekends. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, Wi-Fi, hair dryer, iron (in some rooms).

**O'Casey's Bed & Breakfast** Kids Value If there's a twinkle in John Casey's eye when he puts on a brogue, it's because he was born on U.S. soil, not the auld sod. But he and his wife, Linda Fay, exhibit a down-home friendliness that's no blarney. This Irish-themed B&B is one of the few around that welcomes families and is well equipped to handle them. One suite in the main house has a sitting area with a futon large enough

for a couple of youngsters; another has a trundle bed for two kids in a separate bedroom. Studio apartments in the carriage house offer full kitchens. All of this is not to suggest that accommodations are utilitarian—far from it. Rooms in the main house, a gracious structure built in 1904, feature hardwood floors and antiques, and many bathrooms display claw-foot tubs. There's a wraparound balcony upstairs, too. For a treat, ask Linda (a professional pianist) and John (a choir director and singer) to perform a few numbers for you. All guest rooms are nonsmoking; smoking is permitted in outdoor areas.

225 W. Craig Place (btw. San Pedro Ave. and Main St.), San Antonio, TX 78212. ✆ **800/738-1378** or 210/738-1378. www.ocaseybnb.com. 7 units. $89–$110 double (single-night stays on weekends may be slightly higher). Rates include full breakfast. Extended-stay discounts sometimes available. DISC, MC, V. Street parking. Pets allowed in apartments only; $10 for up to a week. **Amenities:** Wi-Fi in public areas. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, kitchen (in apartments).

## NORTHWEST

### Very Expensive

**Westin La Cantera** ★★★ Kids This resort gives the slightly older Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort (see under "West," below) a run for its money with the well-heeled golfing crowd. They're similar in many ways, with great facilities; sprawling, gorgeous grounds; and loads of Texas character. Both are family-friendly, with theme parks in their backyards (here it's Six Flags Fiesta Texas) and excellent children's programs. But the Westin has the edge when it comes to golf, boasting two championship courses (in addition to the much-praised La Cantera, there's a newer Arnold Palmer–designed course) plus a professional golf school. It's a tad more romantic, too, with dramatic rocky outcroppings and gorgeous views from its perch on one of the highest points in San Antonio. And the Shops at La Cantera provides a mall (with the only Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom in San Antonio) close by with lots of stores and boutiques.

The resort is designed around state historical motifs. The Texas colonial architecture is impressive, and the tales and legends detailed in plaques in the various rooms are interesting; but you'll probably be too busy having fun to pay them much mind. Likewise, the casual, conservatively decorated rooms—equipped with all the business amenities conference attendees need—are likely to be abandoned for the resort's myriad recreational areas, or at least for the balconies that many of the guest quarters offer. Remnants of the limestone quarry on which the resort was built were incorporated into the five swimming pools interconnected with bridges and channels and a dramatic waterfall. Indigenous wildlife—deer, rabbits, and wild turkeys—make their appearance at dusk, which is a good time to be exploring the resort's grounds. Or you can enjoy the dusk at the resort's restaurant, **Francesca's at Sunset,** which serves Southwestern and American cooking.

16641 La Cantera Pkwy. (take the La Cantera Pkwy. exit off I-10 and turn left; resort entrance is ¾ mile ahead, on the right), San Antonio, TX 78256. ✆ **800/WESTIN-1** (937-8461) or 210/558-6500. Fax 210/641-0721. www.westinlacantera.com. 508 units. $229–$369 double; suites from $380; casitas from $350. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $15; free self-parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor heated pool; 2 golf courses; 2 lit tennis courts; health club; spa; Jacuzzi; children's center; video arcade; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; massage; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

### Expensive

**Omni San Antonio** ★ Kids This polished granite high-rise off I-10 west is convenient to SeaWorld, Six Flags Fiesta Texas, the airport, and the Hill Country, and the shops and restaurants of the 66-acre Colonnade complex are within easy walking

distance. The lobby is soaring and luxurious, and guest rooms are well-appointed in a traditional but cheery traditional style. The proximity to the theme parks, as well as in-room Nintendo and various other Omni Kids features, makes this hotel as appealing to families as it is to business travelers, who appreciate its exercise facilities, which are better than most in San Antonio and definitely the best in this part of town. Guests can also get treadmills brought into their rooms as part of the Omni "Get Fit" program. Although the hotel sees a lot of tourist and Medical Center traffic, service here is prompt and courteous.

9821 Colonnade Blvd. (at Wurzbach), San Antonio, TX 78230. ✆ **800/843-6664** or 210/691-8888. Fax 210/691-1128. www.omnihotels.com. 326 units. $169 double; suites from $300. Discount packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $10; free self-parking. Pets 25 lb. or less permitted; $50 nonrefundable fee. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor pool; outdoor pool; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; free airport shuttle; business center; Wi-Fi in public areas; limited room service; laundry/dry cleaning; club-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WEST

### Very Expensive

**Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort & Spa** ★★★ Kids If I were feeling flush and didn't want to spend a lot of time downtown, this would be my favorite place to settle in for a week. The setting, on 200 acres of former ranch land on the far-west side of San Antonio, is idyllic. The resort's interiors are contemporary and make much use of the native limestone, with Spanish-style wrought-iron accents. The on-site activities, ranging from golf to yoga to tubing on the 950-foot-long Ramblin' River, will please a wide range of interests.

And it just keeps getting better. A spa was recently added. Low-key and relaxing, it boasts all the latest treatments, and is one of the best pampering palaces in this part of Texas. The rooms are finished in Southwestern colors, and are furnished in a kind of modern version of Spanish colonial. They are large, and many offer French doors that open out onto wood-trimmed porches or balconies.

This resort is the most family-friendly in San Antonio. SeaWorld sits at your doorstep, there are free laundry facilities and a country store for supplies, and every room has a refrigerator (not stocked with goodies). When you're tired of all that family bonding, the Hyatt Kids Club will keep the youngsters happily occupied while you spend some quality time relaxing on "Ramblin' River," which amounts to a kind of re-creation of a central Texas river, of the kind suitable for floating in and letting yourself be carried by the current.

9800 Hyatt Resort Dr. (off Hwy. 151, btw. Westover Hills Blvd. and Potranco Rd.), San Antonio, TX 78251. ✆ **800/55-HYATT** (554-9288) or 210/647-1234. Fax 210/681-9681. http://hillcountry.hyatt.com. 500 units. $285–$400 double; $450–$2,550 suite. Rates lower late Nov to early Mar; packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $10; free self-parking. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 2 bars; 4 outdoor pools; golf course; 3 tennis courts (1 lit); 24-hr. health club; spa; 5 Jacuzzis; bikes on loan; children's programs; youth spa; game room; concierge; business center; Wi-Fi in public areas; room service; laundry/dry cleaning; free washer/dryer; club-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, high-speed Internet access, fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## NORTH CENTRAL (NEAR THE AIRPORT)

### Expensive

**San Antonio Airport Hilton** ★ The rooms at this airport Hilton offer a bit of local character, with a few Southwestern decorative touches. They're attractive and spacious. The hotel is straight west of the airport, on the north wide of Loop 410, making it easy

to get to and easy to find. Of course, it's predominantly a business traveler's hotel, but it doesn't have that feel, thanks to things like the cheerful lobby with colorful Texas mural, the large outdoor pool, and **Tex's Grill** (p. 295), which is very family oriented, and serves some mean Texas barbecue. Such nongeneric features as an outdoor putting green also help make your stay enjoyable. But while this hotel may be playful, it also knows how to get down to business.

611 NW Loop 410 (San Pedro exit), San Antonio, TX 78216. ✆ **800/HILTONS** (445-8667) or 210/340-6060. Fax 210/377-4674. www.hilton.com. 386 units. $169–$199 double; suites from $175. Romance, weekend packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; putting green; courtesy car; business center; Wi-Fi in public areas; 24-hr. room service; same-day dry cleaning; club-level rooms. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Inexpensive

**La Quinta Inn & Suites San Antonio Airport** Bunched up around the intersection of Hwy. 281 and Loop 410 are a number of airport hotels. Among them is this property, which is nicely located so that it doesn't front either freeway. It's still easy to find, has an airport shuttle that can also take you to any restaurant in a 2-mile radius, and has easy access to Hwy. 281 South, which leads to downtown. The property is only 5 years old and is well maintained. Guest rooms are plain but are comfortable and functional. And the bathrooms are a cut above the competition in this category in that they have a little more room and better lighting.

850 Halm Blvd., San Antonio, TX 78216. ✆ **800/753-3757** or 210/342-3738. Fax 210/348-9666. www.lq.com. 276 units. $100–$155 double. Rates include free breakfast buffet. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets accepted free. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; airport shuttle; laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.



## 4 WHERE TO DINE

The downtown dining scene, especially that found along the River Walk, is the one most visitors will become familiar with. I've devoted a good deal of space to restaurants in this area. However, many of these restaurants can be overpriced and overcrowded. You'll also find some good restaurants in Southtown, but many of the best places are scattered throughout the north, especially around the higher-income neighborhoods. The most fertile ground for fine dining in San Antonio is on and around Broadway, starting a few blocks south of Hildebrand, extending north to Loop 410, and comprising much of the posh area known as Alamo Heights. Brackenridge Park, the zoo, the botanical gardens, and the Witte and McNay museums are all situated in this part of town, so you can combine your sightseeing with some serious eating.

### DOWNTOWN

#### Very Expensive

**Biga on the Banks** ★★★ NEW AMERICAN The setting and the cooking at this River Walk establishment are bold and contemporary. Clean lines, high ceilings, and gleaming wood floors are the scene for chef/owner Bruce Auden's intriguing, innovative cuisine with a subtle Texas influence. The starters include Asian spring rolls filled with minced venison, buffalo, ostrich, and pheasant accompanied by two spicy dipping sauces. The bone-on tenderloin steak with beer-battered onion rings and habanero

ketchup raises comfort cuisine to new heights, and the variations on a theme in the Paseo de Chocolate dessert will send you happily into sugar shock, international-style. All this, yet the food is not nearly as dazzling as it used to be. Still, it's way above average, and if you're willing to eat before 6:30pm or after 9pm, you can sample a three-course meal for $37 per person, or four courses for $43.

International Center, 203 S. St. Mary's St./River Walk. ✆ **210/225-0722.** www.biga.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $19–$36; brunch $32 adults, $17 children 12 and under. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm.

**Le Rêve** ★★★ FRENCH This restaurant is for serious diners, for whom fine dining is one of the ultimate expressions of civilized life. The chef/owner Andrew Weissman is originally from San Antonio but has spent many years honing his craft in France and elsewhere. His exacting method of cooking has garnered lavish praise and won many awards from the national food press. The menu items vary depending upon availability of ingredients. When they're on the menu, scallop dishes as well as beef tournedos dishes are good choices. The caramelized onion tart is a perennial. Try it. There is a tasting menu (with or without wine) and five-, four-, and three-course menus too. The attention to detail extends to the choice of wines, the small size and arrangement of the dining room, and the manner of service—everything is aimed at complementing the food without being imposing or distracting.

152 E. Pecan St. at St. Mary's. ✆ **210/212-2221.** www.restaurantlereve.com. Reservations required. Jacket required for men. Tasting menu $100, $165 with wine; prix-fixe 3 courses $80, 4 courses $90, 5 courses $100. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 5:30–11pm (last reservation taken for 8:30pm seating).

**Little Rhein Steak House** AMERICAN/STEAKS Built in 1847 in what was then the Rhein district, the oldest two-story structure in San Antonio has hosted an elegant steakhouse abutting the river and La Villita since 1967. Antique memorabilia decks the indoor main dining room, and a miniature train surrounded by historic replicas runs overhead. Leafy branches overhanging the River Walk patio are draped in little sparkling lights. The choice USDA Prime steaks from the restaurant's own meat plant are tasty, but recent competition from chains such as the Palm and Morton's nearby has resulted in a price hike. Now everything here—a baked potato, creamed spinach—is a la carte. The restaurant can also get quite noisy. That said, this is still one of the few family-owned steakhouses around, and it offers a unique River Walk dining experience.

231 S. Alamo at Market. ✆ **210/225-2111.** www.littlerheinsteakhouse.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $21–$42. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–10pm.

## Expensive

**Boudro's** ★ NEW AMERICAN Locals tend to look down their noses at River Walk restaurants—with the long-running exception of Boudro's. The kitchen uses fresh local ingredients, and the preparations and presentations do them justice. The setting is also out of the ordinary, boasting a turn-of-the-20th-century limestone building with hardwood floors and a handmade mesquite bar. You might start with the guacamole, prepared tableside and served with tostadas, or the pan-fried Texas crab cakes. The prime rib, blackened on a pecan-wood grill, is deservedly popular, as is the pork chop with sun-dried cherry and chili marmalade. The food may be innovative, but portions are hearty nevertheless. For dessert, the whiskey-soaked bread pudding is fine, and the lime chess pie with a butter pastry crust is divine. Service is very good despite the volume of business and the time the servers spend mixing up guacamole.

421 E. Commerce St./River Walk. ✆ **210/224-8484.** www.boudros.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Main courses $20–$33. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight.

**Paesano's Riverwalk ★** ITALIAN This River Walk incarnation of a longtime San Antonio favorite relinquished its old chianti bottle–kitsch decor for a soaring ceiling, lots of inscrutable contemporary art, and a more up-to-date menu. But the one thing the restaurant couldn't give up, at the risk of a local insurrection, was the signature shrimp Paesano's. The crispy crustaceans are as good as their devotees claim, as are the reasonably priced pizzas. Other good values are the hearty southern Italian staples such as lasagna with meat sauce. Locals tend to go to the newer—and somewhat quieter—Paesano's, across from the Quarry Golf Club at 555 Basse Rd., Ste. 100 (✆ **210/828-5191**).

111 W. Crockett, Ste. 101/River Walk. ✆ **210/227-2782.** www.paesanosriverwalk.com. Reservations accepted for 10 or more only. Pizzas $14; pastas $8.95–$19; main courses $17–$29. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

**Sandbar ★★** SEAFOOD Andrew Weissman, the owner of Le Rêve (see above), has opened this restaurant just around the corner from his original place. This is another small restaurant, with only a bar section and around 8 tables. It's designed simply in black, white, and stainless steel. Don't expect the formal dining that Le Rêve is famous for; this place is casual, but the attention to the food is serious. Emphasis is on fresh, most evident in the raw oysters (six or seven varieties daily), the sashimi, and the ceviche. Sampling these makes you wonder what this restaurant knows that other seafood places don't. There's also a lobster bisque that's heavenly.

102 E. Pecan St. (at N. St. Mary St.). ✆ **210/222-2426.** Reservations accepted. Main courses $20–$40. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 5:30–11pm.

## Moderate

**Acenar ★★** (Value) MEXICAN When Lisa Wong (Rosario) and Bruce Auden (Biga), two longtime darlings of the San Antonio dining scene, collaborate on a restaurant, you figure the food and the atmosphere are going to be creative. Their "modern Tex-Mex" fare and the seemingly endless series of wildly colorful dining rooms (one on the river) in which it's served don't disappoint. In fact, both the food and the service exceed expectations, given the (over) size of this place and the crowds that immediately began to throng to it.

It's hard to go wrong with any of the dishes, but standouts include the crepes with duck in a tamarind-cherry-grilled-onion sauce, and the tacos filled with crabmeat *tinga* (a kind of stew with onions, tomatoes, and chipotle chiles) served with avocado. You can eat well and still leave with money in your pocket if you go for something other than the specialty dishes, which are pricier but can be worth the splurge.

146 E. Houston St. (next to the Hotel Valencia). ✆ **210/222-CENA** (222-2362). www.acenar.com. Reservations not accepted (priority seating for large parties). Lunch $7–$10 (specialties $10–$16); dinner $13–$15 (specialties $16–$30). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Bar Mon–Wed 4–10pm; Thurs–Sat 4pm–2am.

**Casa Rio** TEX-MEX Okay, the question is "Where can I eat some Tex-Mex food at a good table by the river?" The answer is that your options are many and few; many bad options and a few passable ones. Of these, my choice would be Casa Rio. When the weather is glorious, there are few things more enjoyable than getting a table at the water's edge; ordering a big platter of something spicy, meaty, and crispy; and sipping down a

frozen margarita. This place has an excellent location, not as crowded as most, and, so long as you stick to the Tex-Mex classics, you'll do fine. Steer clear of the tortilla soup and the tamales (which aren't really a Tex-Mex forte) and go with something like flautas, tacos, or fajitas. Enjoy. This is San Antonio, after all, and you're supposed to do these things.

430 E. Commerce St./River Walk. ✆ **210/225-6718.** www.casa-rio.com. Reservations not accepted. AE, MC, V. Main courses $8–$14. Daily 11am–11pm (weather permitting).

**Sushi Zushi** ★ JAPANESE (Value) For a Japanese food fix in a congenial atmosphere, you can't beat this clean, well-lighted place. You'll find sushi in all its incarnations here, including a My Spurs roll—yellowtail, cilantro, avocado, chives, and *serro* chiles. There are rice bowls, soba noodle bowls, soups, teppanyakis, tempuras—in fact, a mind-boggling array of food choices, not to mention a long list of sakes. Three more branches of Sushi Zushi are in the Northwest at the Colonnade Shopping Center, 9867 W I-10 (✆ **210/691-3332**); in the Northeast at Stone Oak Plaza II, 18720 Stone Oak Pkwy. at Loop 1604 (✆ **210/545-6100**); and in Lincoln Heights at 999 E. Bosse at Broadway (✆ **210/826-8500**).

203 S. Saint Mary's St. (the International Center). ✆ **210/472-2900.** www.sushizushi.com. Reservations recommended on weekends. Sushi rolls and sashimi $6–$15; bowls, tempuras, and other hot entrees $8–$17. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri 11:30am–11pm; Sat 12:30–11pm; Sun 5–9pm.



## Inexpensive

**Mi Tierra** (Moments) If you've come to San Antonio with the idea of tasting traditional Tex-Mex as it is cooked day in and day out, come to Mi Tierra's. This Market Square institution is popular with both tourists and locals. The atmosphere is great and un-self-consciously so San Antonio. You can start with the botanas platter, which offers a good smattering of dishes, such as flautas and mini-tostadas. The top-shelf margarita will make a nice accompaniment. Then move on to the classic Tex-Mex enchiladas bathed in chili gravy. The on-site bakery produces all the baked sweet breads of Mexico collectively known as *pan dulce.* Try one along with a cup of coffee or Mexican hot chocolate.

218 Produce Row (Market Sq.). ✆ **210/225-1262.** www.mitierracafe.com. Reservations accepted for large groups only. Breakfast $7–$10; lunch and dinner plates $8–$19. AE, MC, V. Open 24 hr.

**Schilo's** (Value) (Kids) GERMAN/DELI This place has been here since long before San Antonio started attracting tourists. It's on the river not far from the Alamo and makes for a good place to stop and rest your feet and enjoy a hearty bowl of split pea soup or a piece of the signature cherry cheesecake. The large, open room with its worn wooden booths is classic. The waitresses—definitely not "servers"—wear dirndl-type outfits, and live German bands play on Saturday from 5 to 8pm. The menu has a large kid-friendly selection and retro low prices.

424 E. Commerce St. ✆ **210/223-6692.** Reservations for large groups for breakfast and dinner only. Sandwiches $3.25–$4.75; hot or cold plates $4.75–$5.45; main dishes (served after 5pm) $7–$8.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7am–8:30pm.

# KING WILLIAM/SOUTHTOWN

## Expensive

**Azuca** ★ NUEVO LATINO Anyone familiar with the late, great Latina singer Celia Cruz knows that her signature shout was "Azuca!"—roughly, "Sweetie!" This Southtown restaurant pays tribute to the Cuban-born salsa star in ways other than its name and the

pop images of her that hang in one of the dining rooms. The cooking is strong on Caribbean tastes, using regional spices such as *achiote* and *sofrito,* as well as foods including yuca and ripe plantains. There are also some dishes from South America, including delicious Bolivian *empanadas* and Argentine *parrillada.* The menu is large and will have something to please just about everyone. The ingredients are really fresh and often lend color to the dishes. Much like the food, the setting is also colorful, with contrasting bold tones and modern lines. It makes for an attractive setting. On weekends there's live salsa and merengue in one of the dining rooms.

713 S. Alamo. ✆ **210/225-5550.** www.azuca.net. Reservations recommended. Lunch (salads and sandwiches) $7–$9.50; dinner main courses $14–$27. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–9:30pm (bar until 11pm); Fri–Sat 11am–10:30pm (bar until 2am).

## Moderate

**Rosario's ★** MEXICAN This longtime Southtown favorite, one of the first restaurants to establish a hip culinary presence in the area, has toned its menu down a bit; maybe owner Lisa Wong's adventurous urges have found an outlet in Acenar (see "Downtown," above). But the airy room, with its Frida Kahlo and Botero knockoffs and abundant neon, is as fun as ever. And contemporary Tex-Mex fare, prepared with superfresh ingredients, makes this a great choice for visitors to San Antonio. You might start with the chicken or chorizo quesadillas with guacamole or the fresh-tasting *ceviche fina* (white fish, onions, and jalapeños marinated in lime juice), and then go on to the delicious chile relleno, with raisins and potatoes added to the chopped beef stuffing. The large size of the room means that you generally don't have to wait for a table, but it also means that the noise level can make conversation difficult. I like to go at midafternoon, when the place is usually empty.

910 S. Alamo. ✆ **210/223-1806.** www.rosariossa.com. Reservations not accepted. Lunch $6–$9; main courses $8–$23. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon 11am–3pm; Tues–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm (bar until 2am Fri).

## Inexpensive

**Guenther House ★** (Value) AMERICAN If you're not staying in a King William B&B, this is your chance to visit one of the neighborhood's historic homes. And the food is a winner. Hearty breakfasts and light lunches are served both indoors—in a bright, cheerful, old-style dining room added on to the Guenther family residence (built in 1860)—and outdoors on a trellised patio. The Guenther family owns the Pioneer Flour Mill, which is right across the river and can be seen from the house. Consequently, the restaurant emphasizes baked goods. For breakfast one of the most popular items is the old Southern mainstay, biscuits and gravy. Waffles and pancakes are also popular items, of course, but you can also get breakfast tacos. Breakfast is served all day. The lunch menu is on the light side and includes chicken salad (made with black olives) and mild chicken enchiladas made with flour tortillas. Adjoining the restaurant are a small museum, a Victorian parlor, and a mill store featuring baking-related items, including baking mixes, cookbooks, and kitchen gear. The house fronts a lovely stretch of the San Antonio River.

205 E. Guenther St. ✆ **210/227-1061.** www.guentherhouse.com. Reservations not accepted. Breakfast $3.95–$7.50; lunch $6.50–$7.25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–3pm (house and mill store Mon–Sat 8am–4pm; Sun 8am–3pm).

## Moderate

**La Fonda on Main** ★ (Value) (Kids) MEXICAN/REGIONAL MEXICAN One of San Antonio's oldest continually operating restaurants, established in 1932, has spiffed up both its menu and its premises. The lovely red-tile-roof residence is cheerful and bright—almost as inviting as the garden-fringed outdoor patio. The menu is divided between classic Tex-Mex, featuring giant combination plates such as the La Fonda Special (two cheese enchiladas, a beef taco, a chicken tamale, guacamole, Mexican rice, refried beans) and a "Cuisines of Mexico" section, including such traditional dishes as *mojo de ajo* (Gulf shrimp with garlic butter served with squash).

2415 N. Main. ✆ **210/733-0621.** www.lafondaonmain.com. Reservations recommended for 6 or more. Main courses $8–$12. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–3pm and 5–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 11am–3pm and 5–10:30pm; Sun brunch 11am–3pm.

**Liberty Bar** ★ (Moments) NEW AMERICAN For years, this former bar and brothel—it dates back to 1890—has been an informal hangout spot for locals. The building leans a bit. It's definitely noticeable, and the curious effect it produces in most who view it is the desire for a drink. That's what the bar is counting on. The atmosphere here is quite cheerful. The food is good, too. You'll find comfort food—rib-eye steaks, crab cakes, and the like, as well as salads and sandwiches. The entrees on the daily menu often show a good bit of flare.

328 E. Josephine St. ✆ **210/227-1187.** www.liberty-bar.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$22. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun brunch 10:30am–2pm (bar until midnight Sun–Thurs, until 2am Fri–Sat).

**Los Barrios** MEXICAN This very popular Tex-Mex joint has been around since the '70s, when it first opened in a former Dairy Queen. The Tex-Mex enchiladas, made of red tortillas and cheese bathed in a hearty chili gravy, are great. Or you could go for the five-enchilada plate with one of every variety served here. Departures from Tex-Mex include *cabrito* (goat) in salsa and the *milanesa con papas,* described on the menu (accurately) as a Mexican-style chicken-fried steak. Mondays and Tuesdays are popular for Fajita Nights, when you can get a pound of fajitas with all the sides for $10 ($16 regular price). Wednesdays are Margarita Nights, and on Thursdays there's a special on longnecks.

4223 Blanco Rd. ✆ **210/732-6017.** Reservations accepted for large groups only. Dinners $7–$12. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 10am–11pm; Sun 9am–10pm.

## Inexpensive

**Chris Madrids** (Kids) BURGERS It's hard to drop much money at this funky gas-station-turned-burger-joint, but you might lose your shirt—over the years, folks have taken to signing their Ts and hanging them on the walls. An even more popular tradition is trying to eat the macho burger, as huge as its name might indicate. Several burgers are made with a Tex-Mex twist, adding refried beans, hot sauce, or jalapeños to the mix. The kid-friendly menu includes burgers, nachos, fries, and various combinations of these. The casual atmosphere and down-home cooking keep the large outdoor patio filled.

1900 Blanco Rd. ✆ **210/735-3552.** www.chrismadrids.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $4–$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm.

## Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants

**Chris Madrids** (p. 278) The kid-friendly menu includes burgers, nachos, fries, and various combinations thereof, and the casual atmosphere and down-home cooking make it popular with families.

**La Fonda on Main** (p. 278) With its friendly staff and inexpensive children's plates, this restaurant is a great place to introduce your kids to Mexican food. (Anglo options are available as well.)

**Schilo's** (p. 276) A high noise level, a convenient location near the River Walk (but with prices far lower than anything else you'll find there), and a wide selection of familiar food make this German deli a good choice for the family.

**Demo's** Value GREEK Demo's is a little bit of Greece in San Antonio. Located across the street from a Greek Orthodox church, it's a favorite among members of the local Greek community here. And occasionally you'll see a belly-dancing show (not only here, but in the other two locations as well). You can dine either on the airy patio or in the dining room decorated with murals of Greek island scenes. The menu includes gyros, Greek burgers, dolmas, spanakopita, and other Mediterranean specialties. If you go for Dieter's Special—a Greek salad with your choice of gyros or souvlaki—you might be able to justify the baklava. In addition to this location, there's the original (but more characterless) restaurant at 7115 Blanco Rd. (✆ **210/342-2772**) near Loop 410 across from what used to be Central Park Mall, and a third location farther out at Blanco and Loop 1604 (✆ **210/798-3840**).

2501 N. St. Mary's St. ✆ **210/732-7777.** www.demosgreekfood.com. Reservations accepted for parties of 10 or more only. Main courses $6–$12. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–9pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight.

## ALAMO HEIGHTS AREA

### Expensive

**Bistro Vatel** ★★ Value FRENCH Talk about a pressure cooker: In 1671, the great French chef Vatel killed himself out of shame because the fish for a banquet he was preparing for Louis XIV wasn't delivered on time. Fortunately, his descendant, Damian Watel, has less stress to contend with in San Antonio, where diners are very appreciative of the chef's efforts to bring them classic French cooking at comparatively reasonable prices. The experience of dining here is quite satisfying: comfortable furniture, with ample spacing, white tablecloths, and excellent service. You can't go wrong with the rich escallop of veal with foie gras and mushrooms, and fans of sweetbreads will be pleased to find them here beautifully prepared in truffle crème fraîche sauce. Your best bet is the prix-fixe dinner, where you can choose one each from four appetizers (perhaps shrimp vol-au-vent) and entrees such as roasted quail and enjoy the dessert of the day.

218 E. Olmos Dr. at McCullough. ✆ **210/828-3141.** www.bistrovatel.com. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses $15–$27; prix-fixe dinner $35. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11am–9pm; Sun 5–9pm.

## Local Favorites: Taquerías

Everyone has a fa vorite *taquería* (tac o joint). A c ouple of high-rank ing ones near downtown are **Estela's,** 2200 W. Martin St. (✆ **210/226-2979**), which has musical (salsa, mariachi) br eakfasts on Satur day and Sunda y fr om 10am t o noon, as w ell as a g reat c onjunto/Tejano jukebo x; and **Taco Ha ven,** 1032 S. Presa St. (✆ **210/533-2171**), where the breakfast *migas* (hearty egg and tortilla dish) or chilaquiles (t ortillas la yered with meats , beans, and cheese) will k ick-start y our da y. I n Olmos P ark, **Panchito's,** 4100 M cCullough ( ✆ **210/821-5338**), has hungry San Antonians lining up on weekend mornings for *barbacoa* (Mexican-style barbecue) plat es, heaped with t wo eggs, potat oes, beans, and homemade tortillas.



**Silo** ★★ NEW AMERICAN For my money, this is the best place for fine dining if you're wanting something other than French food. In contrast to many other chic restaurants in to wn, it has quietly gone about its business, focusing on cr eating dishes that satisfy the palate and deliv er something new. These days so many r estaurants will try to get attention b y creating fanciful-sounding dishes with a " cutting-edge" use of ingr edients. I t just gets to be too much. The last couple of meals I had her e w ere per fect. Memorable dishes included the chipotle marinated por k tenderloin with white cheddar andouille grits and peach chutney , the crab spring r olls with shitake mushr ooms and tantalizing dipping sauces, some pan-seared scallops treated very simply, and some wonderful mango-wasabi crab cakes. The attentive waitstaff could answ er most of the questions put to them.

1133 Austin Hwy. ✆ **210/824-8686.** w ww.siloelevatedcuisine.com. Reser vations r ecommended. Main courses $19–$39; prix fix e (salad, entree, dessert) $25 (5:30–6:30pm nightly). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm.

### Moderate

**Ciao Lavanderia** ★ (Value) ITALIAN When the o wner of B istro Vatel (see abo ve) opened a casual Italian eatery just a few doors down from his French restaurant, he stuck with his winning good-food-at-good-prices formula. In this open, cheery storefront, with its post-mod tributes to the business that used to r eside here (exposed ductwork, an old washing machine), y ou select fr om dishes in thr ee price categories. F or $6 y ou can get minestrone, a salad, or sauté; for $12 you can sample one of the pastas, thin-crust pizzas, or lighter seafood and chicken dishes; while for $16 you might enjoy such hearty entrees as a quail and mushroom risotto or pork loin scaloppine parmigiana. Daily specials, such as *osso buco,* tend to fall into these price categories, too . Everything's fresh and delicious, and the portions are geared toward a normal human appetite, not supersiz e.

226 E. Olmos Dr. ✆ **210/822-3990.** Reservations accepted for large parties. Pastas and pizzas $12; main courses $16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–1:30pm and 5:30–10pm; Sat 5:30–10pm.

**Paloma Blanca** ★ MEXICAN A popular choice for interior M exican food with modern, comfor table, and attractiv e dining ar eas, this place has a bit of the feel of an upscale Mexico City restaurant. The main dining room is spacious and has an open feel,

with lots of natural light. On the menu are some great soups, such as the cream soup flavored with *poblano chile* (if you like that combination of cream and poblano but want to forgo a soup course, try the *pollo en crema poblana*). There are several mainstays of Mexican cooking: enchiladas in a dark, earthy *mole* sauce, or in a tangy *salsa verde,* steak *a la tampiqueña,* and a Veracruz-style red snapper. There are also plenty of Tex-Mex standards, such as enchiladas in chili gravy and crispy tacos, substantial vegetarian dishes, too. And there is a separate gluten-free menu (you have to ask for it). The bar is comfortable and has a full margarita menu, which I'm pretty sure is gluten free as well. Keep this place in mind, too, if all you're in the mood for is to enjoy some savory finger food with drinks in attractive surroundings.

5600 Broadway. ✆ **210/822-6151.** www.palomablanca.net. Reservations recommended for large groups only. Main courses $10–$25. AE, MC, V. Tues–Wed 11am–9pm; Thurs–Fri 11am–10pm; Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–9pm.

## 5 SEEING THE SIGHTS

San Antonio has a wide selection of attractions that can satisfy a variety of interests. You could easily fill your time hitting each one on your list, but I would suggest that you set aside at least a little time for aimlessly strolling about the city's downtown.

Before you visit any of the paid attractions, stop in at the **San Antonio Visitor Information Center,** 317 Alamo Plaza (✆ **210/207-6748**), across the street from the Alamo, and ask for their *SAVE San Antonio* discount book; it includes coupons for everything from the large theme parks to some city tours and museums. Many hotels also have a stash of discount coupons for their guests.

### THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

#### Downtown Area

**The Alamo ★★** When most visitors see the Alamo for the first time, their common reaction is "Hmmm, I thought it would be bigger." Though the shape of the facade of the Alamo is widely recognized, most folks think of it as a large fortress. This only underscores how heroic and desperate were the actions of the Alamo's defenders who in 1836 held off a siege by a large Mexican army for 13 days. Among the defenders were famous men of their day, such as Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie, and the idea of their sacrifice for Texas independence gave added meaning to the struggle almost immediately. "Remember the Alamo!" became the battle cry at San Jacinto when the Texans finally defeated the Mexican army and captured its general, López de Santa Anna.

The Alamo's original name was Mission San Antonio de Valero, and many converted Indians from a variety of tribes lived and died here. The complex was secularized by the end of the 18th century and leased out to a Spanish cavalry unit; however, by the time the famous battle took place, it had been abandoned.

The outlying buildings of the original mission are gone. Only the **Long Barrack** (formerly the *convento,* or living quarters for the missionaries) and the much-photographed **mission church** are still here. In truth, the Alamo is more of a shrine than a museum. The exhibits don't do a great job of explaining how the battle developed. If you want to understand more, see the IMAX show in the nearby Rivercenter Mall. A larger **museum** and gift shop are at the back of the complex. A peaceful **garden** and an excellent **research library** (closed Sun) are also on the grounds. Interesting historical presentations are given every

 half-hour by Alamo staffers; for private, after-hour tours, phone ✆ **210/225-1391,** ext. 34.

300 Alamo Plaza. ✆ **210/225-1391.** www.thealamo.org. Free admission (donations welcome). Mon–Sat 9am–5:30pm; Sun 10am–5:30pm. Closed Dec 24–25. Streetcar: Red or Blue lines.

**King William Historic District ★** San Antonio's first suburb, King William was settled in the late 19th century by prosperous German merchants who displayed their wealth through extravagant homes and named the 25-block area after Kaiser Wilhelm of Prussia. The area has gotten so popular that tour buses have been restricted after certain hours. But it's much more pleasant to be on foot here than in a tour bus (and you can now walk from downtown to King William by taking the River Walk's southern extension). You can stroll down tree-shaded King William Street and admire the old houses and their beautifully landscaped yards. Stop at the headquarters of the San Antonio Conservation Society, 107 King William St. (✆ **210/224-6163;** www.saconservation.org), and pick up a self-guided walking tour booklet outside the gate. If you go at a leisurely pace, the stroll should take about an hour. Only the Steves Homestead Museum, 509 King William St. (✆ **210/225-5924**), built in 1876 for a lumber magnate, and the Guenther House (p. 277) are open to the public.

East bank of the river just south of downtown. Streetcar: Blue line.

**La Villita National Historic District ★** Developed by European settlers along the east bank of the San Antonio River in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, La Villita was revitalized in the late 1930s by artists and craftspeople and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Now boutiques, crafts shops, and restaurants occupy this historic district, which resembles a Spanish/Mexican village, replete with shaded patios, plazas, brick-and-tile streets, and some of the settlement's original adobe structures, including the house of General Cós, the Mexican military leader who surrendered to the Texas revolutionary army in 1835. It'll take you only about 20 minutes to do a quick walk-through, unless you're an inveterate shopper—in which case, all bets are off.

Bounded by Durango, Navarro, and Alamo sts. and the River Walk. ✆ **210/207-8610.** www.lavillita.com. Free admission. Shops daily 10am–6pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Dec 25, and Jan 1. Streetcar: Red, Purple, or Blue lines.

**Market Square ★** It may not be quite as colorful as it was when live chickens squawked around overflowing, makeshift vegetable stands, but Market Square will still transport you south of the border. Stalls in the indoor El Mercado sell everything from onyx paperweights and manufactured serapes to high-quality crafts from the interior of Mexico. Across the street, the Farmers' Market, which formerly housed the produce market, has carts with more modern goods.

Bring your appetite along with your wallet: In addition to two Mexican restaurants, almost every weekend sees the emergence of food stalls selling specialties such as *gorditas* (chubby corn cakes topped with a variety of goodies) or funnel cakes (fried dough sprinkled with powdered sugar). Most of the city's Hispanic festivals are held here, and mariachis usually stroll the square. The Museo Alameda (see "More Attractions," below) provides a historic context to an area that can seem pretty touristy—though no more so than any Mexican border town.

Bounded by Commerce, Santa Rosa, Dolorosa, and I-35. ✆ **210/207-8600.** http://tavernini.com/mercado. Free admission. El Mercado and Farmers' Market Plaza summer daily 10am–8pm; winter daily 10am–6pm; restaurants and some shops open later. Closed Thanksgiving, Dec 25, Jan 1, and Easter. Streetcar: Red, Purple, or Yellow lines.

**The River Walk (Paseo del Río) ★★★** Just a few steps below the streets of downtown San Antonio is another world, alternately soothing and exhilarating, depending on where you venture. The quieter areas of the 2½ paved miles of winding riverbank, shaded by cypresses, oaks, and willows, exude a tropical, exotic aura. The River Square and South Bank sections, chockablock with sidewalk cafes, tony restaurants, bustling bars, high-rise hotels, and even a huge shopping mall, have a festive, sometimes frenetic feel. Tour boats, water taxis, and floating picnic barges regularly ply the river, and local parades and festivals fill its banks with revelers.

Although plans to cement over the river after a disastrous flood in 1921 were stymied, it wasn't until the late 1930s that the federal Work Projects Administration (WPA) carried out architect Robert Hugman's designs for the waterway, installing cobblestone walks, arched bridges, and entrance steps from various street-level locations. And it wasn't until the late 1960s, when the River Walk proved to be one of the most popular attractions of the HemisFair exposition, that its commercial development began in earnest. There's a real danger of the River Walk becoming overdeveloped but plenty of quieter spots still exist. And if you're caught up in the sparkling lights reflected on the water on a breeze-swept night, you might forget there was anyone else around.

**San Antonio Museum of Art ★★** This attraction may not be top-listed by everyone, but I enjoy doable (read: not overwhelmingly large) museums with interesting architecture and collections related to the cities in which they're located—and this one definitely fits the bill on all those counts. Several castlelike buildings of the 1904 Lone Star Brewery were gutted, connected, and transformed into a visually exciting exhibition space in 1981. Although holdings range from early Egyptian, Greek, Oceanic, and Asian to 19th- and 20th-century American, it's the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art, opened in 1998, that is the jewel of the collection. This 30,000-square-foot wing hosts the most comprehensive collection of Latin American art in the United States, with pre-Columbian, folk, Spanish colonial, and contemporary works. You'll see everything here from magnificently ornate altarpieces to a whimsical Day of the Dead tableau. The Lenora and Walter F. Brown Asian Art Wing represents another major collection, the largest Asian art collection in Texas and one of the largest in the Southwest.

200 W. Jones Ave. ✆ **210/978-8100.** www.samuseum.org. Admission $8 adults, $7 seniors, $5 students with ID, $3 children 4–11, free for children 3 and under. Free general admission Tues 4–9pm (fee for some special exhibits). Tues 10am–9pm; Wed–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–6pm. Closed Thanksgiving Day, Dec 25, Jan 1, Easter Sunday, and Fiesta Friday. Bus: 7, 8, 9, or 14.

## Alamo Heights Area

**Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum ★★★** This museum has a knockout setting on a hill north of Brackenridge Park with a forever view of the city, and it's in a sprawling Spanish Mediterranean–style mansion (built in 1929) so picturesque that it's constantly used as a backdrop for weddings and photo shoots. The collection is quite good if you enjoy modern art. It has at least one work by many of the American and European masters of the past 2 centuries, including works by van Gogh, Manet, Gauguin, Degas, O'Keeffe, Hopper, Matisse, Modigliani, Cézanne, and Picasso, to name just a few. The McNay just finished a modern addition that nearly doubles its gallery space, yet the museum manages to retain an intimate feel. The addition, designed by French architect Jean-Paul Viguier, is modern and airy and quite enjoyable, adding variety to the original gallery space. It has an innovative roof and ceiling that allows it to filter and adjust the lighting to the needs of a particular exhibit. The McNay occasionally hosts major traveling shows and, with the new addition, will probably host more of these

exhibits. It'll take you 2 hours to go through this place at a leisurely pace, longer if it's cool enough for you to stroll the beautiful 23-acre grounds dotted with sculpture and stunning landscaping.

6000 N. New Braunfels Ave. ✆ **210/824-5368.** www.mcnayart.org. Admission $13 adults, $10 seniors, $10 students with ID, free for children 12 and under. Tues–Wed 10am–4pm; Thurs 10am–9pm; Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, July 4th, Thanksgiving, and Dec 25. Bus: 14.

**Witte Museum** ★ (Kids) A family museum that adults will enjoy almost as much as kids, the Witte focuses on Texas history, natural science, and anthropology, with occasional forays as far afield as the Berlin Wall. Your senses will be engaged along with your intellect: You might hear birdcalls as you stroll through the Texas Wild exhibits, or feel rough-hewn stone carved with Native American pictographs beneath your feet. Children especially like exhibits devoted to mummies and dinosaurs, as well as the EcoLab, where live Texas critters range from tarantulas to tortoises. But the biggest draw for kids is the terrific HEB Science Treehouse, a four-level, 15,000-square-foot science center that sits behind the museum on the banks of the San Antonio River; its hands-on activities are geared to all ages. Also on the grounds are a butterfly and hummingbird garden and three restored historic homes. ***Note:*** Several years ago the museum acquired the wonderful Herzberg Circus Collection, and parts of it are regularly incorporated into the museum's exhibits.

3801 Broadway (adjacent to Brackenridge Park). ✆ **210/357-1900.** www.wittemuseum.org. Admission $7 adults, $6 seniors, $5 children 4–11, free for children 3 and under; free Tues 3–8pm. Tues 10am–8pm; Mon and Wed–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed 3rd Mon in Oct, Thanksgiving, and Dec 24–25. Bus: 7, 9, or 14.





## South Side

**San Antonio Missions National Historical Park** ★★ The Alamo was just the first of five missions established by the Franciscans along the San Antonio River to Christianize the native population. The four other missions, which now fall under the aegis of the National Park Service, are still active parishes, run in cooperation with the Archdiocese of San Antonio. But the missions were more than churches: They were whole communities. The Park Service has assigned each mission an interpretive theme to educate visitors about the roles they played in early San Antonio society. You can visit them separately, but if you have the time, see them all; they were built uncharacteristically close together and—now that you don't have to walk there or ride a horse—it shouldn't take you more than 2 or 3 hours to see them. If your time is limited, definitely visit San José and try to make it to San Francisco, even though it's the farthest from downtown.

**Concepción,** 807 Mission Rd. at Felisa, built in 1731, is the oldest unrestored Texas mission—it looks much as it did 200 years ago. **San José** ★★, 6701 San José Dr. at Mission Road, established in 1720, was the largest, best known, and most beautiful of the Texas missions. It was reconstructed to give visitors a complete picture of life in a mission community. Popular mariachi Masses are held here every Sunday at noon (come early if you want a seat). Moved from an earlier site in east Texas to its present location in 1731, **San Juan Capistrano,** 9101 Graf at Ashley, doesn't have the grandeur of the missions to the north, but the original simple chapel and the wilder setting give it a peaceful, spiritual aura. The southernmost mission in the San Antonio chain, **San Francisco de la Espada** ★, 10040 Espada Rd., also has an ancient, isolated feel, although the beautifully maintained church shows just how vital it still is to the local community.

Headquarters: 2202 Roosevelt Ave. Visitors Center: 6701 San José Dr. at Mission Rd. ✆ **210/932-1001.** www.nps.gov/saan. Free admission (donations accepted). All the missions daily 9am–5pm. National Park Ranger tours daily. Closed Thanksgiving, Dec 25, and Jan 1. Bus: 42 stops at Mission San José (and near Concepción).

## Far Northwest

**Six Flags Fiesta Texas ★** (Kids) In 2004, Tornado, an extremely wet-and-wild tunnel and funnel-tubing experience, joined the Superman Krypton Coaster, nearly a mile of twisted steel with six inversions; the Rattler, one of the world's highest and fastest wooden roller coasters; the 60-mph-plus Poltergeist roller coaster; and Scream!, a 20-story space shot and turbo drop, to name just a few. Laser games and virtual reality simulators complete the technophile picture. Feeling more primal? Wet-'n'-wild attractions include the Lone Star Lagoon, the state's largest wave pool; the Texas Treehouse, a five-story drenchfest whose surprises include a 1,000-gallon cowboy hat that tips over periodically to soak the unsuspecting; and Bugs' White Water Rapids. If you want to avoid both sogginess and adrenaline overload, there is a vast variety of food booths, shops, crafts demonstrations, and live shows. This theme park still has some local character, dating back to the days when it was plain old Fiesta Texas: Themed areas include a Hispanic village, a western town, and a German town.

17000 I-10W (corner of I-10W and Loop 1604). ✆ **800/473-4378** or 210/697-5050. www.sixflags.com/parks/fiestatexas. Admission $50 adults, $37 seniors 55 and over, $32 children less than 48 in., free for children 2 and under. Discounted 2-day and season passes available. The park opens at 10am; closing times vary depending on the season, as late as 10pm in summer. The park is generally open daily late May to mid-Aug; Sat–Sun Mar–May and Sept–Oct; closed Nov–Feb. Call ahead or visit website for current information. Parking $15 per day. Bus: 94 (summer only). Take exit 555 (La Cantera Pkwy.) on I-10W.

## West Side

**SeaWorld San Antonio ★** (Kids) Leave it to Texas to provide Shamu, the performing killer whale, with his most spacious digs: At 250 acres, this SeaWorld is the largest of the Anheuser-Busch-owned parks, which also makes it the largest marine theme park in the world. If you're a theme park fan, you're likely to find the walk-through habitats where you can watch penguins, sea lions, sharks, tropical fish, and flamingos do their thing fascinating, but the aquatic acrobatics at such stadium shows as Shamu Adventure, combining live action and video close-ups, and Viva, where divers and synchronized swimmers frolic with whales and dolphins, might be even more fun.

You needn't get frustrated just looking at all that water because there are loads of places here to get wet. The Lost Lagoon has a huge wave pool and water slides aplenty, and the Texas Splashdown flume ride and the Rio Loco river-rapids ride also offer splashy fun; younger children can cavort in Shamu's Happy Harbor and the Lil Gators section of the Lost Lagoon. Nonaquatic activities include the Steel Eel, a huge "hypercoaster," and the Great White, the Southwest's first inverted coaster—which involves going head over heels during 2,500 feet of loops (don't eat before either of them).

10500 SeaWorld Dr., 16 miles northwest of downtown San Antonio at Ellison Dr. and Westover Hills Blvd. ✆ **800/700-7786.** www.seaworld.com. 1-day pass $45 adults, $3 off adult price for seniors (55 and older), $40 children 3–9, free for children 2 and under. Discounted 2-day and season passes available. Internet purchase discounts. Open early Mar–late Nov; days of operation vary. Open at 10am on operating days; closing times vary. Call ahead or check website for current information. Parking $12 per day. Bus: 64. From Loop 410 or from Hwy. 90W, exit Hwy. 151W to the park.

## Downtown Area

**Museo Alameda** Inaugurated in April 2007, the Museo Alameda is the nation's largest museum celebrating Latino culture. It has 20,000 square feet of exhibition space divided up into 11 galleries. Its location in San Antonio is ideal in that the city's population is majority Hispanic. Though the Museo doesn't have a permanent collection, it has many resources to lean on, including a close association with the Smithsonian Institute. The exhibits, each running about 6 months, seek to place in view the Latino experience in America. They are meant to explore themes such as the various things that America represents for Latinos, and what the old homeland, be it Mexico or another country, comes to signify, as well. Such a broad purpose embraces art and artifact, art and history, to piece together its narrative on Latino culture. It necessarily leans heavily on the expertise of the curators who will create these exhibitions. The building proper is an attractive addition to the area around Market Square. It injects color and bold modern lines. The main decorative feature is some elaborate stainless steel panels that variously bring to mind the wrought-iron work of colonial Latin America and the humble decorative practice of cutting designs into folded paper *(papel picado)*.

101 S. Santa Rosa Blvd. (at Commerce, in Market Sq.). ✆ **210/299-4300.** www.thealameda.org. Suggested donation adults $4, seniors $3, students with ID $2, families $12. Tues–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun noon–6pm. Streetcar: Red, Purple, or Yellow lines.

**San Fernando Cathedral** ★ Construction of a church on this site, overlooking what was once the town's central plaza, was begun in 1738 by San Antonio's original Canary Island settlers and completed in 1749. Part of the early structure is incorporated into the magnificent Gothic revival–style cathedral built in 1868. Jim Bowie got married here, and General Santa Anna raised the flag of "no quarter" from the roof during the siege of the Alamo in 1836.

115 Main Plaza. ✆ **210/227-1297.** www.sfcathedral.org. Free admission. Daily 6am–7pm; gift shop Mon–Fri 9am–4:30pm, Sat until 5pm. Streetcar: Purple or Yellow lines.

**Spanish Governor's Palace** ★ (Finds) Never actually a palace, this 1749 adobe structure formerly served as the residence and headquarters for the captain of the Spanish presidio. It became the seat of Texas government in 1772, when San Antonio was made capital of the Spanish province of Texas and, by the time it was purchased by the city in 1928, it had served as a tailor's shop, barroom, and schoolhouse. The building, with high ceilings crossed by protruding viga beams, is beautiful in its simplicity, and the 10 rooms crowded with period furnishings paint a vivid portrait of upper-class life in a rough-hewn society.

105 Plaza de Armas. ✆ **210/224-0601.** www.sanantonio.gov/dtops/SpanGovPal.asp. Admission $2 adults, $1 children 7–13, free for children 6 and under. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, San Jacinto Day (Apr 21), Thanksgiving, and Dec 25. Streetcar: Purple line.

## PARKS & GARDENS

**HemisFair Park** (Kids) Built for the 1968 HemisFair, an exposition celebrating the 250th anniversary of the founding of San Antonio, this urban oasis boasts **water gardens** and a **wood-and-sand playground** constructed by children (near the Alamo St. entrance). Among its indoor diversions are the **Institute of Texan Cultures** and the **Tower of the Americas.** The **Schultze House Cottage Garden** ★, 514 HemisFair Park (✆ **210/229-9161**), created and maintained by Master Gardeners of Bexar County, is

also worth checking out for its heirloom plants, varietals, tropicals, and xeriscape area. Look for it behind the Federal Building.

Bounded by Alamo, Bowie, Market, and Durango sts. No phone. www.sanantonio.gov/sapar/hemisfair.asp. Streetcar: Blue, Yellow, or Purple lines.

**San Antonio Botanical Gardens ★** Take a horticultural tour of Texas at this gracious 38-acre garden, encompassing everything from south Texas scrub to Hill Country wildflowers. Fountains, pools, paved paths, and examples of Texas architecture provide visual contrast to the flora. The formal gardens include a garden for the blind, a Japanese garden, an herb garden, a biblical garden, and a children's garden. Perhaps most outstanding is the $6.9-million Lucile Halsell Conservatory complex, a series of greenhouses replicating a variety of tropical and desert environments. The 1896 Sullivan Carriage House, built by Alfred Giles and moved stone by stone from its original downtown site, serves as the entryway to the gardens.

555 Funston. ✆ **210/207-3250.** www.sabot.org. Admission $6 adults; $4 seniors, students, and military; $3 children 3–13; free for children 2 and under. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25 and Jan 1. Bus: 7, 9, or 14.

## ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

The prime spots for kids in San Antonio are SeaWorld and Six Flags Fiesta Texas. In addition to these sights, detailed in "The Top Attractions" and "More Attractions" sections above, there's the **San Antonio IMAX Theater Rivercenter ★**, 849 E. Commerce St., in the Rivercenter Mall (✆ **800/354-4629** for recorded schedule information, or 210/247-4629; www.imax-sa.com). Having kids view *Alamo: The Price of Freedom* on a six-story-high screen with a stereo sound system is a surefire way of getting them psyched for the historical battle site just across the street.

Adults may get the bigger charge out of the waxy stars and some of the oddities collected by the globetrotting Mr. Ripley at the nearby **Plaza Wax Museum & Ripley's Believe It or Not,** 301 Alamo Plaza (✆ **210/224-9299;** www.plazawaxmuseum.com), just down the block, but there's plenty for kids to enjoy at this twofer attraction. The walk-through wax Theater of Horrors usually elicits some shudders, and at Believe It or Not, youngsters generally get a kick out of learning about people around the world whose habits are even weirder than their own. Just down the block is the three-fer **Ripley's Haunted Adventure, Guinness World Records Museum,** and **Tomb Rider 3D,** 329 Alamo Plaza (✆ **210/226-2828**). There's something for everyone at this multimillion-dollar entertainment complex, whether you like getting spooked by high-tech haunts, marveling at the odd things people will do to break records, or hearing about the world according to Davy Crockett—as reported by his friend, the bear.

Also downtown, the **San Antonio Children's Museum ★★**, 305 E. Houston St. (✆ **210/21-CHILD** [212-4453]; www.sakids.org), provides a wonderful introduction to the city for the pint-size and grown-up alike. San Antonio history, population, and geography are all explored through such features as a miniature River Walk, a multicultural grocery store—and even a miniature dentist's office. See also "San Antonio After Dark," below, for the **Magik Theatre.**

If the family gets overheated, head to **Splashtown,** 3600 N. I-35 (✆ **210/227-1100;** www.splashtownsa.com), which includes a huge wave pool, hydro tubes nearly 300 feet long, a Texas-size water bobsled ride, more than a dozen water slides, and a two-story playhouse for the smaller children.

## ORGANIZED TOURS

San Antonio's organized tours basically provide you with an efficient way to get around and pick up some local lore. **San Antonio City Tours,** 1331 N. Pine (✆ **800/868-7707** or 210/228-9776; www.sacitytours.net), serves up a large menu of guided bus excursions, covering everything from San Antonio's missions and museums to shopping forays south of the border. The **Alamo Trolley Tour,** 216 Alamo Plaza (✆ **210/225-8587;** www.sacitytours.net), touches on all the downtown highlights, plus two of the missions in the south. If you want to get off at any of these sights, you can pick up another trolley (they run every 45 min.) after you're finished. To get up close and personal with the River Walk, try a **Rio San Antonio River Cruise.** This amusing, informative tour, lasting from 35 to 40 minutes, will take you more than 2 miles down the most built-up sections of the Paseo del Río, with interesting sights pointed out along the way. Ticket offices are at the Rivercenter Mall and at the River Walk, under the Market Street Bridge (✆ **210/244-5700;** www.riosanantonio.com).

# 6 SPORTS & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES



Most San Antonians head for the hills—that is, nearby Hill Country—for outdoor recreation. Some suggestions of sports in or around town follow; see the section "Hill Country Side Trips from San Antonio" for more.

**BIKING** With the creation and continuing improvements of the biking paths along the San Antonio River, part of the larger **Mission Trails** project, local and visiting cyclists will finally have a good place within the city to spin their wheels. Other options within San Antonio itself include **Brackenridge Park** and **McAllister Park** on the city's north side, 13102 Jones-Maltsberger (✆ **210/207-PARK** [207-7275] or 207-3120); and around the area of **SeaWorld of Texas.** If you didn't bring your own, **Charles A. James Bicycle Company,** 329 N. Main Ave. (✆ **210/224-8717;** www.charlesajamesbicycle.com), will deliver bikes to your door free if you're staying downtown. Perhaps the best resource in town is the website of the San Antonio Wheelmen, **www.sawheelmen.com**, with details on local organized rides and links to bicycle shops in the area.

**GOLF** Golf has become a big deal in San Antonio, with more and more visitors coming to town expressly to tee off. Of the city's six municipal golf courses, two of the most notable are **Brackenridge,** 2315 Ave. B (✆ **210/226-5612**), the oldest (1916) public course in Texas, featuring oak- and pecan-shaded fairways; and northwest San Antonio's $4.3-million **Cedar Creek,** 8250 Vista Colina (✆ **210/695-5050**), repeatedly ranked as South Texas's best municipal course in golfing surveys. For details on both of these and other municipal courses, log on to www.sanantonio.gov/sapar/golf.asp. Other options for unaffiliated golfers include the 200-acre **Pecan Valley,** 4700 Pecan Valley Dr. (✆ **210/333-9018**), which crosses the Salado Creek seven times and has an 800-year-old oak near its 13th hole; the high-end **Quarry,** 444 E. Basse Rd. (✆ **800/347-7759** or 210/824-4500; www.quarrygolf.com), on the site of a former quarry and one of San Antonio's newest public courses; and **Canyon Springs,** 24405 Wilderness Oak Rd. (✆ **888/800-1511** or 210/497-1770; www.canyonspringsgc.com), at the north edge of town in the Texas Hill Country, lush with live oaks and dotted with historic rock formations. There aren't too many resort courses in San Antonio because there aren't too many resorts, but the two at the **Westin La Cantera,** 16401 La Cantera Pkwy. (✆ **800/446-5387** or 210/558-4653; www.lacanteragolfclub.com)—one designed by Jay Morish and

Tom Weiskopf, the other by Arnold Palmer—have knockout designs and dramatic hill-and-rock outcroppings to recommend them. Expect to pay $37 to $53 per person for an 18-hole round at a municipal course with a cart, from $70 to as much as $130 (on weekends) per person at a private resort's course. Twilight (afternoon) rates are often cheaper. To get a copy of the free *San Antonio Golfing Guide,* call ✆ **800/447-3372** or log on to www.visitsanantionia.com/visitors/play/golf/index.aspx.

**HIKING** The 240-acre **Friedrich Wilderness Park,** 21480 Milsa (✆ **210/698-1057;** www.wildtexas.com/parks/fwp.php), operated by the city of San Antonio as its only nature preserve, is crisscrossed by 5.5 miles of trails that attract bird-watchers as well as hikers; a 2-mile stretch is accessible to people with disabilities.

**RIVER SPORTS** For tubing, rafting, or canoeing along a cypress-lined river, San Antonio river rats head 35 miles northwest of downtown to the 2,000-acre **Guadalupe River State Park,** 3350 Park Rd. 31 ( ✆ **830/438-2656;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/guadalup), near Boerne. Five miles north of Hwy. 46, just outside the park, you can rent tubes, rafts, and canoes at the **Bergheim Campground,** FM 3351 in Bergheim (✆ **830/336-2235**).

**TENNIS** With a reservation you can play at the 22 lighted hard courts at the **McFarlin Tennis Center,** 1503 San Pedro Ave. (✆ **210/732-1223**), for the very reasonable fees of $2.50 per hour per person ($1 for students and seniors), $3.50 ($2) after 5pm.

## SPECTATOR SPORTS

**BASKETBALL** Spurs madness hits San Antonio every year from mid-October to May, when the city's only major-league franchise, the **San Antonio Spurs,** shoots hoops. Ticket prices range from $10 for nosebleed-level seats to $100 for seats on the corners of the court. Tickets are available at the Spurs Ticket Office in the AT&T Center, which is at One AT&T Center Pkwy. (✆ **210/444-5819**), or via Ticketmaster San Antonio (✆ **210/224-9600;** www.ticketmaster.com). Get schedules, players' stats, and promotional news—everything you might want to know or buy relating to the team—online at www.nba.com/spurs.

**GOLF** The **AT&T Championship,** an Official Senior PGA Tour Event, is held each October at the Oak Hills Country Club, 5403 Fredericksburg Rd. (✆ **210/698-3582**). One of the oldest professional golf tournaments, now known as the **Valero Texas Open,** showcases the sport in September at the Resort Course at La Cantera Golf Club, 16401 La Cantera Pkwy. ( ✆ **201/345-3818**). Log on to www.pgatour.com/r/schedule for information about both.

**RODEO** If you're in town in early February, don't miss the chance to see 2 weeks of Wild West events such as calf roping, steer wrestling, and bull riding at the annual **San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo.** You can also hear major live country-and-western talent. Call ✆ **210/225-5851,** or log on to www.sarodeo.com for information on schedules.

## 7 SHOPPING IN SAN ANTONIO

San Antonio offers the shopper a variety of large malls and little enclaves of specialized shops. You'll find everything here from the utilitarian to the unusual: a huge Sears department store, a Saks Fifth Avenue fronted by a 40-foot pair of cowboy boots, a mall with a river running through it, and some lively Mexican markets.

You can count on most shops around town being open from 9 or 10am to 5:30 or 6pm Monday through Saturday, with shorter hours on Sunday. Malls are generally open Monday through Saturday 10am to 9pm and on Sunday noon to 6pm. Sales tax in San Antonio is 8.25%.

## SHOPPING AREAS

Most out-of-town shoppers will find all they need **downtown,** between the large Rivercenter Mall, the boutiques and crafts shops of La Villita, the colorful Mexican wares of Market Square, the Southwest School of Art and Craft, and assorted retailers and galleries on and around Alamo Plaza. More avant-garde boutiques and galleries, including Blue Star, can be found in the adjacent area known as Southtown.

Most San Antonians prefer to shop in the malls along Loop 410, especially North Star, Huebner Oaks, and Alamo Quarry Market. The city's newest large-scale mall, **Shops at La Cantera,** is out along the outer loop (Loop 1604). It's an outdoor mall with a blue-ribbon collection of stores, including the city's only Neiman Marcus and only Nordstrom, and it has plenty of smaller retail stores and boutiques that cater to a well-heeled customer base. More upmarket retail outlets can be found closer to downtown in the fancy strip centers that line Broadway, where it passes through Alamo Heights (the posh Collection and Lincoln Heights are particularly noteworthy).

## ART

**ArtPace,** in the northern part of downtown, and the **Blue Star Arts Complex,** in Southtown, are the best venues for cutting-edge art, but **Finesilver Gallery,** 816 Camaron St., Suites 1 and 2, just north of downtown (✆ **210/354-3333;** www.finesilver.com), is a good alternative. Downtown is home to several galleries that show more established artists. Two of the top ones are **Galería Ortiz,** 102 Concho, in Market Square (✆ **210/225-0731**), San Antonio's premier place to buy Southwestern art; and **Nanette Richardson Fine Art,** 555 E. Basse Rd. (✆ **210/930-1343;** www.nanetterichardsonfineart.com), with a wide array of oils, watercolors, bronzes, ceramics, and handcrafted wood furnishings.

For more details on these and other galleries, pick up a copy of the **San Antonio Gallery Guide,** at the San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau, 317 Alamo Plaza (✆ **800/447-3372** or 210/207-6000). You can also check out the art scene online at the Office of Cultural Affairs' website, **www.sahearts.com**, with links to several local galleries.

## CRAFTS/FOLK ART

Mexican folk art and handicrafts make wonderful take-homes from San Antonio, and several of the best places to find them are in Southtown. They include **San Angel Folk Art,** 1404 S. Alamo, Ste. 110, in the Blue Star Arts Complex (✆ **210/226-6688;** www.sanangelfolkart.com), chockablock with colorful, whimsical, and well-made wares; and **Tienda Guadalupe Folk Art & Gifts,** 1001 S. Alamo (✆ **210/226-5873**), where you can pick up a Day of the Dead T-shirt, or anything else you can think of relating to the early November holiday celebrated with great fanfare in San Antonio. Just north of downtown, near Monte Vista, the two-level **Alamo Fiesta,** 2025 N. Main at Ashby (✆ **210/738-1188;** www.alamofiesta.com), catering to local Hispanic families, has a huge selection of crafts at extremely reasonable prices. If you like to see the creative process in progress, come to **Garcia Art Glass, Inc.,** 715 S. Alamo St. (✆ **210/354-4681;**

www.garciaartglass.com), to see beautiful glass bowls, wall sconces, mobiles, and more come into being. Not everything is very portable, but the bracelets and other pretty baubles made out of glass beads definitely are. Or stop by **Glassworks,** 6350 N. New Braunfels Ave. (✆ **210/822-0146**), where their goal is to show that in addition to being gorgeous, blown glass can also be formed into items that are interesting—a golf putter, for example—affordable, and accessible.

## MALLS & SHOPPING CENTERS

Although it's officially **Alamo Quarry Market,** 255 E. Basse Rd. (✆ **210/824-8885;** www.quarrymarket.com), no one ever calls this relative newcomer to the mall scene anything but "The Quarry"—in large part because from the early 1900s until 1985 the property was in fact a cement quarry. This unenclosed mall has a series of large emporiums (such as Borders and Old Navy) and smaller upscale boutiques (Laura Ashley and Aveda). Starring Saks Fifth Avenue–the one fronted by the huge pair of cowboy boots—and upscale shops such as Abercrombie & Fitch and Williams-Sonoma, **North Star Mall,** Loop 410, between McCullough and San Pedro (✆ **210/340-6627;** www.northstarmall.com), is the crème de la crème of the San Antonio indoor malls. But there are many sensible shops here, too, including a Mervyn's department store. Both the Quarry and North Star Mall are about 15 minutes from downtown. At the light-filled, bustling **Rivercenter Mall,** 849 E. Commerce (✆ **210/225-0000;** www.shoprivercenter.com), you can pick up a ferry from a downstairs dock, listen to bands play on a stage surrounded by water, or visit the IMAX theater and a comedy club. The 130-plus shops, anchored by Dillard's and Foleys, run the price gamut, but tend toward upscale casual. Upscale shoppers migrate to the far northwest part of town, to the **Shops at La Cantera,** 16401 La Cantera Pkwy. Check **www.shoplacantera.com** for details.

## WESTERN WEAR

A one-stop shopping center for all duds Western, **Boot Hill** at Rivercenter Mall, 849 E. Commerce, Ste. 213 (✆ **210/223-6634**), is one of the few left in town that's locally owned. At **Lucchese Gallery,** 255 E. Basse, Ste. 800 (✆ **210/828-9419;** www.lucchese.com), footwear is raised to the level of art. If it ever crawled, ran, hopped, or swam, these folks can probably put it on your feet. Lucchese is far better known than **Little's Boots,** 110 Division Ave. (✆ **210/923-2221;** www.davelittleboots.com), but this place—established in 1915—uses as many esoteric leathers and creates fancier footwear designs. If you're willing to wait a while, you can get anything you like hand-customed for you. The late Pope John Paul II, Prince Charles, and Dwight Yoakam all had headgear made for them by **Paris Hatters,** 119 Broadway (✆ **210/223-3453;** www.parishatters.com), in business since 1917 and still owned by the same family. About half of the sales are special order, but the shelves are stocked with high-quality ready-to-wear hats.

## MARKETS

Two large indoor markets, **El Mercado** and the **Farmers' Market**—often just called, collectively, the Mexican market—occupy adjacent blocks on Market Square at 514 W. Commerce St., near Dolorosa (✆ **210/207-8600**). Competing for your attention are more than 100 shops and pushcarts and an abundance of food stalls. The majority of the shopping booths are of the border-town sort, filled with onyx chess sets, cheap sombreros, and the like, but you can also find a few higher quality boutiques. Come here for a bit of local color, good people-watching, and food.

# 8 SAN ANTONIO AFTER DARK

San Antonio has its symphony and its Broadway shows, and you can see both at one of the most beautiful old movie palaces in the country. But much of what the city has to offer is not quite so mainstream. Latin influences lend spice to some of the best local nightlife. Don't forget San Antonio is the birthplace of Tejano music, a unique blend of German polka and northern Mexico ranchero sounds (with a dose of pop added for good measure). It also celebrates its Mexican heritage with colorful dance troupes, known as ***ballet folklórico,*** who perform to more traditional Mexican music. And Southtown, with its many Hispanic-oriented shops and galleries, celebrates its art scene with the monthly First Friday, a kind of extended block party.

For the most complete listings of what's on while you're visiting, pick up a free copy of the weekly alternative newspaper, the ***Current,*** or the Friday "Weekender" section of the ***San Antonio Express-News.*** You can also check out the website of **San Antonio Arts & Cultural Affairs:** www.sanantonio.gov/art. There's no central office in town for tickets, discounted or otherwise. You'll need to reserve seats directly through the theaters or clubs, or, for large events, through **Ticketmaster** (✆ **210/224-9600;** www.ticketmaster.com). Generally, box office hours are Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm, and 1 to 2 hours before performance time. The **Majestic** (see below) and **Empire** (see below) also have hours on Saturday 10am to 3pm.

## THE PERFORMING ARTS

The San Antonio Symphony is the city's only resident performing arts company of national stature, but smaller, less professional groups keep the local arts scene lively, and cultural organizations draw world-renowned artists. The city provides them with some unique venues—everything from standout historic structures such as the Majestic, Empire, Arneson, and Sunken Garden theaters to the state-of-the-art AT&T Center.

### Major Arts Venues

If you're visiting San Antonio from May to August, you might want to catch a performance at the **Arneson River Theatre,** La Villita (✆ **210/207-8610;** www.lavillita.com/arneson). Built by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) in 1939 as part of architect Robert Hugman's design for the River Walk, this unique theater has a stage on one side of the river, where it narrows considerably, and the seating on the opposite side. Most performances are *ballet folklórico.*

The baroque Moorish/Spanish revival–style **Majestic Theatre,** 230 E. Houston (✆ **210/226-3333;** www.majesticempire.com), hosts some of the best entertainment in town—the symphony, major Broadway productions, big-name solo performers.

There's always something happening at the **Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center,** 1300 Guadalupe (✆ **210/271-3151;** www.guadalupeculturalarts.org), the main locus for Latino cultural activity in San Antonio. Visiting or local directors put on six or seven plays a year; the Xicano Music Program celebrates the popular local conjunto and Tejano sounds; and the CineFestival, running since 1977, is one of the town's major film events.

Smaller than its former rival the Majestic (see above), just down the block, the **Empire Theatre,** 226 N. St. Mary's St. (✆ **210/226-5700;** www.majesticempire.com), hosts a similarly eclectic array of acts, including musical performance, lectures, and literary events.

## Classical Music

The **San Antonio Symphony,** 222 E. Houston St. (✆ **210/554-1000** or 554-1010 box office; www.sasymphony.org), is one of the finest in the United States. Founded in 1939, the orchestra celebrated its 50th anniversary by moving into the Majestic Theatre, the reopening of which was planned to coincide with the event. The symphony offers two major annual series, classical and pops. The classical series showcases the talents of music director emeritus Christopher Wilkens and a variety of guest performers, while for the pops series, you might find anyone from banjo virtuoso Buddy Wachter to Tito Puente, Jr., to Three Dog Night. Tickets range from $15 to $90, $15 to $62 for pops.

## Theater

Most of San Antonio's major shows turn up at the Majestic or Empire theaters, but several smaller theaters are of interest too. The **Actors Theater of San Antonio,** 1920 Fredericksburg Rd. (✆ **210/738-2872**), uses local talent for its productions, which tend to be in the off-Broadway tradition. The community-based **Josephine Theater,** 339 W. Josephine St. (✆ **210/734-4646;** www.josephinetheatre.org), puts on an average of five productions a year—mostly musicals—at the Art Deco–style Josephine Street Theater, only 5 minutes from downtown. Whether it's an original piece by a member of the company or a work by a guest artist, anything you see at the **Jump-Start Performance Company,** 108 Blue Star Arts Complex (1400 S. Alamo; ✆ **210/227-JUMP** [227-5867]; www.jump-start.org), is likely to push the social and political envelope. This is the place to find such big-name performance artists as Karen Finley or Holly Hughes who tour San Antonio. The only professional family theater in town, the popular **Magik Theatre,** Beethoven Hall, 420 S. Alamo in HemisFair Park (✆ **210/227-2751;** www.magiktheatre.org), features a daytime series with light fare for ages 3 and older, and evening performances, recommended for those 6 and older, that may include weightier plays. About half the plays are adaptations of published scripts, while the other half are originals, created especially for the theater. San Antonio's first public theater, the **San Pedro Playhouse,** 800 W. Ashby (✆ **210/733-7258;** www.sanpedroplayhouse.com), presents a wide range of plays in a neoclassical-style performance hall built in 1930. For information on other small theaters in San Antonio and links to many of those listed in this section, log on to the website of the **San Antonio Theater Coalition** at www.satheatre.com.

# THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

The closest San Antonio comes to having a club district is the stretch of North St. Mary's between Josephine and Magnolia—just north of downtown and south of Brackenridge Park—known as the **Strip.** This area was hotter about 15 years ago, but it still draws a young crowd to its restaurants and lounges on the weekend. The River Walk clubs tend to be touristy, and many of them close early because of noise restrictions.

In addition to the **Alamodome,** 100 Montana St. (✆ **210/207-3663;** www.sanantonio.gov/dome), the major concert venues in town include **Verizon Wireless Amphitheater,** 16765 Lookout Rd., north of San Antonio just beyond Loop 1604 (✆ **210/657-8300;** www.vwatx.com), and, when the Spurs aren't playing there, downtown's **AT&T Center,** One AT&T Center Pkwy. (✆ **210/444-5000;** www.nba.com/spurs).

## Country & Western

John T. Floore, the first manager of the Majestic Theatre, opened up **Floore's Country Store,** 14664 Old Bandera Rd., 2 miles north of Loop 1604 (✆ **210/695-8827;** www.

## Conjunto: An American Classic

Although conjunto is one of our country's original contributions to world music, for a long time few Americans outside Texas knew much about it.

It evolved at the end of the 19th century, when South Texas was swept by a wave of German immigrants who brought with them popular polkas and waltzes. These sounds were easily incorporated into—and transformed by—Mexican folk music. The newcomer accordion, cheap and able to mimic several instruments, was happily adopted, too. With the addition at the turn of the 20th century of the *bajo sexto,* a 12-string guitarlike instrument used for rhythmic bass accompaniment, conjunto was born.

San Antonio is to conjunto music what Nashville is to country. The most famous *bajo sextos,* used nationally by everyone who is anyone in conjunto and Tejano music, were created in San Antonio by the Macías family—the late Martín and now his son, Alberto. The undisputed king of conjunto, **Flaco Jiménez**—a mild-mannered triple-Grammy winner who has recorded with the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and Willie Nelson, among others—lives in the city. And San Antonio's **Tejano Conjunto Festival,** held each May, is the largest of its kind, drawing aficionados from around the world—there's even a conjunto band from Japan.

Most of the places to hear conjunto and Tejano are off the beat en tourist path, and they come and go fairly quickly. Those that have been around for a while—and are visitor-friendly—include **Arturo's Sports Bar & Grill,** 3310 S. Zarzamora St. (✆ **210/923-0177**), and **Cool Arrows,** 1025 Nogalitos St. (✆ **210/227-5130**). For live music schedules, check the Tejano/Conjunto section under "Entertainment" and "Music" of www.mysanantonio.com, the website of the *San Antonio-Express News*. You can also phone **Salute!** (see above) to find out which night of the week they're featuring a Tejano or conjunto band. Best yet, just attend one of San Antonio's many festivals—you're bound to hear these rousing sounds.



liveatfloores.com), in 1942. A couple of years later, he added a cafe and a dance floor—at half an acre, the largest in south Texas—and since then, the establishment has hosted country greats such as Willie Nelson, Hank Williams, Sr., and, more recently, Lyle Lovett and Dwight Yoakam. The lively 1880s-style **Leon Springs Dancehall,** 24135 I-10, Boerne Stage Road exit (✆ **210/698-7072;** www.leonspringsdancehall.com), can pack some 1,200 people into its 18,000 square feet. Lots of folks come with their kids when the place opens at 7pm. Some of the best local country-and-western talent is showcased here on Friday and Saturday nights, the only 2 nights the dance hall is open.

### Jazz & Blues

If you like big bands and Dixieland, there's no better place to listen to music downtown than the **Landing,** Hyatt Regency Hotel, River Walk (✆ **210/325-2495;** www.landing.com), one of the best traditional jazz clubs in the country. You might have heard cornetist Jim Cullum on the air waves: His American Public Radio program, *Riverwalk, Live*

*from the Landing,* is now broadcast on more than 160 stations nationwide. The live jazz at tiny **Salute!,** 2801 N. St. Mary's St. (✆ **210/732-5307;** www.saluteinternationalbar.com), tends to have a Latin base, but you never know what you're going to find here—anything from synthesized '70s sounds to conjunto. A friendly music garden, **Kingston Tycoon Flats,** 2926 N. St. Mary's St. (✆ **210/731-9838**), is a fun place to kick back and listen to blues, rock, acoustic, or jazz. The burgers and Caribbean dishes are good, too. Bring the kids—an outdoor sandbox is larger than the dance floor.

## THE BAR SCENE

**A MICROBREWERY** Preppie and gallery types don't often mingle, but the popularity with college kids of the **Blue Star Brewing Company,** 1414 S. Alamo, no. 105 (✆ **210/212-5506**), in the Blue Star Arts Complex, demonstrates the transcendent power of good beer (the pale ale is especially fine).

**A HISTORIC BAR** More than 100 years ago, Teddy Roosevelt recruited men for his Rough Riders unit at the dark, wooded **Menger Bar,** Menger Hotel, 204 Alamo Plaza (✆ **210/223-4361**); they were outfitted for the Spanish-American War at nearby Fort Sam Houston. Constructed in 1859 on the site of William Menger's earlier successful brewery and saloon, the bar was moved from its original location in the Victorian hotel lobby in 1956, but 90% of its historic furnishings remain intact. You can still see an "X" on the bar put there by prohibitionist Carrie Nation, and Spanish Civil War uniforms hang on the walls.

**LOCAL FAVORITE** During the week, lawyers and judges come to unwind at the **Cadillac Bar & Restaurant,** 212 S. Flores (✆ **210/223-5533**), in a historic stucco building near the Bexar County Courthouse and City Hall; on weekends, singles take the stand.

**A WINE BAR** **Zinc** (✆ **210/224-2900**), at 209 N. Presa, in the downtown area, is enjoyed for its cozy, laid-back feel. Hardwood floors, exposed brick walls, and shelves of books give it an intimate, relaxing feel.

**A MARTINI BAR** The River Walk's nod to retro chic, **Swig** (✆ **210/476-0005;** www.swigmartini.com) is so popular it spurred a national chain. Single-barrel bourbon, single-malt scotch, and a wide selection of beer and wines fill out the drink menu, but martinis are always the top seller. Nightly live jazz and cigar smoke are part of the scene.

**A SPORTS BAR** If you want to hang with the Spurs, come to **Tex's Grill,** San Antonio Airport Hilton and Conference Center, 611 NW Loop 410 (✆ **210/340-6060**), regularly voted San Antonio's best sports bar in the *Current* readers' polls. Among Tex's major array of exclusively Texas sports memorabilia are a signed Nolan Ryan jersey and one of George Gervin's basketball shoes—the other is at the newer Tex's on the River, at the Hilton Palacio del Rio.

## THE GAY & LESBIAN SCENE

Tina Turner, Deborah Harry, and La Toya Jackson—the real ones—have all played the **Bonham Exchange,** 411 Bonham (✆ **210/271-3811;** www.bonhamexchange.com), a high-tech dance club near the Alamo. While you may find an occasional cross-dressing show here, the mixed crowd of gays and straights, young and old, come mainly to move to the beat under wildly flashing lights. Main Street just north of downtown has three gay men's clubs in close proximity (it's been nicknamed the "gay bar mall"). **Pegasus,** 1402 N. Main (✆ **210/299-4222**), is your basic cruise bar. The **Silver Dollar,** 1418 N.

 Main (✆ **210/227-2623**), does the country-and-western thing. And **The Saint,** 1430 N. Main (✆ **210/225-7330**), caters to dancing fools. Covers are low to nonexistent at all three. Popular lesbian bars include **Bermuda Triangle,** 119 El Mio (✆ **210/342-2276**), and **Petticoat Junction,** 1812 N. Main (✆ **210/737-2344**).

## 9 HILL COUNTRY SIDE TRIPS FROM SAN ANTONIO

San Antonio lies at the southern edge of the Hill Country, Austin at its eastern edge. The interstate highway I-35 that runs between these two cities parallels a geological feature called the Balcones Escarpment, which is a fault zone that was created when the Edwards Plateau, a thick shelf of limestone, was gently pushed up about 1,000 feet above the coastal plains. This plateau extends for hundreds of miles north and west of San Antonio and Austin; the part closest to these cities is called the Hill Country. The extra elevation makes the climate a little milder, and the water pouring through the limestone creates an abundance of natural springs (and lots of caverns and caves, too).

In the 19th century, these features attracted many German and Czech settlers who were fleeing the social upheavals in Europe. They established small towns that now dot the area and add a little contrast to the prevailing cowboy culture. The mild climate, rolling hills, and abundant springs continue to attract visitors to this part of the state, with summer camps, guest ranches, and resorts serving a public that comes here to enjoy the outdoors.







### BOERNE ★

From San Antonio, the quickest route to the Hill Country is to take I-10 northwest to Boerne (rhymes with "journey"). Boerne's a good base for travelers, as it's near both a big city (just 30 miles from San Antonio) and the more rural areas to the north and west. A popular health resort in the 1880s, the little (2¼-mile-long) town near Cibolo Creek was first settled 30 years earlier by freedom-seeking German intellectuals, including firebrand journalist Ludwig Börne, for whom it was named. A gazebo with a Victorian cupola in the center of the main plaza often hosts concerts by the Boerne Village Band, the oldest continuously operating German band in the world outside Germany (it first tuned up in 1860). A number of the town's 19th-century limestone buildings house small historical museums, boutiques, and restaurants, and old-fashioned lampposts and German street signs add atmosphere. But Boerne's biggest draw is the crafts and antiques shops lining the *Hauptstrasse,* or main street. For details, stop in at the **Boerne Visitors Center,** 1407 S. Main (south corner of the Wal-Mart parking lot), Boerne, TX 78006 (✆ **888/842-8080** or 830/249-7277; www.visitboerne.org).

One of the most popular nearby attractions is **Cascade Caverns** (✆ **830/755-8080;** www.cascadecaverns.com); drive about 3 miles south of Boerne on I-10, take exit 543, and drive a little over 2⅕ miles east. This active cave boasts huge chambers, a 100-foot underground waterfall, and comfortable walking trails; guides provide 45-minute to 1-hour interpretive tours every 30 minutes. It's open Memorial Day through mid-August daily 9am to 5pm; off season Monday through Friday 10am to 4pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am to 4pm. Admission is $11 adults, $7 children.

## A Taste of Alsace in Texas

Just 20 miles west of San Antonio (via U.S. 90 W.), Castroville has become something of a bedroom community for San Antonio, but the center of town retains its heritage as an old Alsatian community. Henri Castro, a Portuguese-born Jewish Frenchman, received a 1.25-million-acre land grant from the Republic of Texas in exchange for his commitment to colonize the land. He founded it on a scenic bend of the Medina River in 1842. Second only to Stephen F. Austin in the number of settlers he brought over, Castro recruited most of his 2,134 immigrants from the Rhine Valley, especially from the French province of Alsace. A few of the oldest citizens still can speak Alsatian, a dialect of German, though the language is likely to die out in the area when they do.

Get some insight into the town's history at the **Landmark Inn State Historic Site,** 402 E. Florence St., Castroville, TX 78009 (✆ **830/931-2133;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/landmark), which also counts a nature trail, an old gristmill, and a stone dam among its attractions. The park's centerpiece, the **Landmark Inn** offers eight simple rooms decorated with early Texas pieces dating up until the 1940s.

For a delicious taste of the past, visit **Haby's Alsatian Bakery,** 207 U.S. 90 East (✆ **830/931-2118**), owned by the Tschirhart family since 1974 and featuring apple fritters, strudels, stollens, breads, and coffeecakes. Open Monday to Saturday 5am to 7pm.

For additional information, contact the **Castroville Chamber of Commerce,** 802 London St., P.O. Box 572, Castroville, TX 78009 (✆ **800/778-6775** or 830/538-3142; www.castroville.com), where you can pick up a walking-tour booklet of the town's historic buildings, as well as a map that details the local boutiques and antiques shops (they're not concentrated in a single area). It's open 9am to noon and 1 to 3pm Monday through Friday.

***Note:*** Downtown Castroville tends to close down on Monday and Tuesday, and some places are shuttered on Wednesday and Sunday as well. If you want to find everything open, come on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday.

### Where to Stay

Now an appealing B&B in the heart of town, **Ye Kendall Inn,** 128 W. Blanco, Boerne, TX 78006 (✆ **800/364-2138** or 830/249-2138; www.yekendallinn.com), opened as a stagecoach lodge in 1859. The rooms ($110–$130) and suites ($140–$160) are individually—and attractively—decorated, some with Victorian antiques, others with American rustic pieces. Historic cabins ($160–$180) transported to the grounds are available too.

### Where to Dine

The **Limestone Grille,** in Ye Kendall Inn (see above), 128 W. Blanco (✆ **830/249-9954**), offers a Southwestern/American menu. It's open for lunch Monday through Saturday, dinner Tuesday to Saturday, and brunch only Sunday; entrees are moderate to expensive. The more casual **Bear Moon Bakery,** 401 S. Main St. (✆ **830/816-BEAR** [816-2327]), is ideal for a hearty breakfast or light lunch. Organic ingredients and locally

grown produce enhance the flavor of the inventive soups, salads, sandwiches, and wonderful desserts. It's open Tuesday to Saturday 6am to 5pm, Sunday 8am to 4pm, and is inexpensively priced. At the **Dodging Duck Brewhaus** (✆ **830/248-DUCK** [248-3825]), at 402 River Rd., the food is mix and match—a variety of portion sizes and ethnic origins—and somewhat hit-and-miss; but you can't beat the views of Cibolo Creek from the front deck, and the beer, handcrafted on the premises, is top-notch. It's open daily for lunch and dinner. Prices are moderate.

## BANDERA

Bandera is a slice of life out of the Old West, a town that could serve as a John Ford film set. Established as a lumber camp in 1853, this popular guest-ranch center still has the feel of the frontier. Not only are many of its historic buildings intact, but people are as genuinely friendly as any you might imagine from America's small-town past. True, the roads are getting more crowded each year, but once you hunker down, you're unlikely to need to do much driving around.

### What to See & Do

Interested in delving into the town's roots? Pick up a self-guided tour brochure of historic sites—including **St. Stanislaus** (1855), the country's second-oldest Polish parish—at the **Bandera County Convention and Visitors Bureau,** 1206 Hackberry St., Bandera, TX 78003 (✆ **800/364-3833** or 830/796-3045; www.banderacowboycapital.com), open weekdays 9am to 5pm, Saturday 9am to 2pm. Or explore the town's living traditions by strolling along Main Street, where a variety of crafters work in the careful, hand-hewn style of yesteryear. Shops include **Kline Saddlery** (✆ **830/522-0335**), featuring belts, purses, briefcases, and flask covers, as well as horse wear; the **Stampede** (✆ **830/796-7650**), a good spot for Western collectibles; and the huge **Love's Antique Mall** (✆ **830/796-3838**), a one-stop shopping center for current local crafts as well as things retro. Off the main drag, buy beautiful customized belt buckles, spurs, and jewelry at **Hy O Silver,** 715 13th St. (✆ **830/796-7961**). Naturally, plenty of places in town such as the **Cowboy Store,** 302 Main St. (✆ **830/796-8176**), can outfit you in Western duds.

### The Great Outdoors

You don't have to go farther than **Bandera Park** (✆ **830/796-3765**), a 77-acre green space within the city limits, to enjoy nature, whether you want to stroll along the River Bend Native Plant Trail or picnic by the Medina River. Or you can canter through the **Hill Country State Natural Area,** 10 miles southwest of Bandera (✆ **830/796-4413;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/hillcoun), the largest state park in Texas allowing horseback riding. It has about 40 miles of trails for the use of riders, hikers, and mountain bikers. A few adjacent ranches can provide mounts. You should inquire at the Bandera Visitors Bureau. Be sure to take water along because none is available at the park. Primitive camping sites are available.

### Staying at a Guest Ranch

At the **Dixie Dude Ranch,** P.O. Box 548, Bandera, TX 78003 (✆ **800/375-YALL** [375-9255] or 830/796-7771; www.dixieduderanch.com), a longtime favorite retreat, you're likely to see white-tailed deer or wild turkeys as you trot on horseback through a 725-acre spread. The down-home, friendly atmosphere keeps folks coming back year after year. Rates are $135 per adult per night (assuming double occupancy).

Tubing on the Medina River and soaking in a hot tub are among the many activities at the **Mayan Ranch,** P.O. Box 577, Bandera, TX 78003 (✆ **830/796-3312** or 460-3036; www.mayanranch.com), another well-established family-run place ($150 per adult); corporate groups often come for a bit of loosening up. The ranch provides plenty of additional Western fun for its guests during high season—things like two-step lessons, cookouts, hayrides, singing cowboys, or trick-roping exhibitions.

The owner of **Silver Spur Guest Ranch,** 9266 Bandera Creek Rd., Bandera, TX 78003 (✆ **830/796-3037** or 460-3639; www.ssranch.com), used to be a bull rider, so the equestrian expertise of the staff is especially high ($130 per adult). So is the comfort level. The rooms in the main ranch house and the separate cabins are individually decorated, with styles ranging from Victorian pretty to country rustic. The ranch, which abuts the Hill Country State Natural Area, also boasts the region's largest swimming pool, some roaming buffalo, and a great kids' play area.

## Where to Dine

Those not chowing down at a guest ranch might want to put on the feed bag on Main Street's **O.S.T.** (✆ **830/796-3836**), named for the Old Spanish Trail that used to run through Bandera. Serving up down-home Texas and Tex-Mex victuals since 1921, this cafe has a room dedicated to the Duke and other cowboy film stars. It's open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; entrees are inexpensive to moderate.

**Brick's River Cafe,** 1105 Main St. (✆ **830/460-3200**), lays on huge platters of down-home country standards like chicken-fried steak or fried catfish for seriously hungry diners. Less health-defying dishes such as green salads and plenty of vegetable side dishes are available here, too. An open deck and huge windows afford excellent Medina River vistas. It's open daily for lunch and dinner; meals are moderately priced.

It's not easy to find a seat inside **Mac and Ernie's,** a quirky, semigourmet eatery in a shack some 12 miles west of Bandera in Tarpley (✆ **830/562-3250**). But that's okay, because the picnic tables out back are the perfect setting for the outstanding steaks, catfish, and specials like quail in ancho honey, served on paper plates with plastic utensils. Hours are very limited (lunch Wed, lunch and dinner Fri–Sat), and prices are moderate.

## Some Local Honky-Tonks

Don't miss **Arkey Blue & The Silver Dollar Bar** ★★ (✆ **830/796-8826**), a genuine spit-and-sawdust cowboy honky-tonk on Main Street usually called Arkey's. No one who tends toward the P.C. should enter the tiny **11th Street Cowboy Bar,** 307 11th St. (✆ **830/796-4849**), what with all the bras hanging off the rafters. But you can always just listen to Cajun and country bands. At the **Bandera Saloon,** 401 Main St. (✆ **830/796-3699**), the deck is out front and overlooks the town's main drag, but the boot-scootin' to live rockabilly and country music takes place inside the large barnlike structure.

9

# Austin

*by David Baird*

In almost anything you read or hear about Austin, you will be told that it is a laid-back city. "Laid-back" has become Austin's defining trait. First-time visitors get here and expect to find a city whose denizens all move about and express themselves in the unhurried manner of Willie Nelson. They must feel a little put upon when they drive into town only to find bearish traffic and pushy drivers and a downtown that is looking uncomfortably similar to Houston or Dallas.

Over the years Austin has gotten bigger and busier, but it hasn't lost its essential nature. Stay here for a couple of days and you'll feel the laid-back quality you've heard about. Austinites are personable, gracious, and open, and for them the enjoyment of the simple pleasures of life holds a great deal more attraction than the rat race. At times it seems that everyone you meet is either a musician or a massage therapist, or has some other sort of alternative career.

Austinites of all walks of life enjoy the outdoors. Barton Springs is the preferred spot for a swim; the popular hike-and-bike trail that encircles Town Lake is a favorite place for either a leisurely walk or a serious run. The city streets and bike lanes are filled with Austin's many cyclists. Just outside of town are several parks, nature preserves, rivers, and lakes that can be enjoyed. Hand in hand with this love of the outdoors is a strong environmental consciousness, which is reflected in the local government. Austin leads the nation in green energy production, has the most aggressive recycling and energy conservation programs in the state, and, though starting late, has instituted programs to reduce traffic and urban sprawl.

Finally, one can't talk about Austin for very long without mentioning the rather large university at its center. The University of Texas has brought thousands of bright, young students here, who, once they get their degrees, decide that they don't want to leave. They stay and add to a large pool of educated people looking for a livelihood. This has attracted large high-tech companies that seek an educated workforce. Austin has also been fertile grounds for a lot of native start-up companies in all kinds of fields.

Austin is now big enough to be many things to many people. But to me it's the creative center and the social and environmental conscience of Texas.

## 1 ORIENTATION

### ARRIVING

**BY PLANE** The **Austin-Bergstrom International Airport** (✆ **512/530-ABIA** [530-2242]; www.ci.austin.tx.us/austinairport; airport code **AUS**) is on the site of the former Bergstrom Air Force Base, just off Hwy. 71 (Ben White Blvd.) and only 8 miles

southwest of the capitol. There's a visitor information booth on the lower level of the terminal, open daily from 7am to 11pm.

Taxis usually form a line outside the terminal, though occasionally you won't find any waiting. To ensure off-hour pickup in advance, phone **American Yellow Checker Cab** (✆ **512/452-9999**) before you leave home. The ride between the airport and downtown costs around $25, including tip.

If you're not in a huge rush to get to your hotel, **SuperShuttle** (✆ **800/BLUE VAN** [258-3826] or 512/258-3826; www.supershuttle.com) is a less expensive alternative to cabs, offering comfortable minivan service to hotels and residences. Prices range from $12 one-way ($22 round-trip) for trips to a downtown hotel to $14 ($24 round-trip) for trips to a central hotel and $18 ($26) for trips to a hotel in the northwestern part of town. The drawback is that you often must share your ride with several others, who may be dropped off first. You don't have to book in advance for pickups at the airport, but you do need to phone 24 hours ahead of time to arrange for a pickup if you're leaving town.

For 75¢ you can go from the airport to downtown or the university area on a city bus called the **Airport Flyer** (no. 100). It runs until about midnight. The passenger pickup is outside the arrival gates, close to the end of the concourse. Buses depart about every 40 minutes. You can grab a route schedule from the city's visitor information office, by the baggage carousels. Or you can download it from the **Capital Metro Transit** website (www.capmetro.org). Most of the major car-rental companies have outlets at the airport. The trip from the airport to downtown by car or taxi can take anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes, much more if you're headed to north Austin. During rush hour, there are often backups all along Hwy. 71. Be sure to slot in extra time when you need to catch a flight.

**BY TRAIN** The **Amtrak** station (✆ **512/476-5684**) is at Lamar and West First Street, in the southwest part of downtown. There are generally a few cabs waiting to meet the trains, but if you don't see one, you'll find a list of phone numbers of taxi companies posted near the pay phones. Some of the downtown hotels offer courtesy pickup from the train station. A cab ride shouldn't run more than $5 or $6 (there's a $3 minimum charge).

**BY BUS** The **bus terminal** is near Highland Mall, about 10 minutes north of downtown and just south of the I-35 motel zone. There are some hotels within walking distance, and many others a short cab ride away; a few taxis usually wait outside the station. If you want to go downtown, you can catch either bus no. 7 (Duval) or bus no. 15 (Red River) from the bus stop across the street. A cab ride downtown—about 10 minutes away on the freeway—should cost around $10.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Austin Visitor Center** is downtown at 209 E. 6th St. (✆ **866/GO-AUSTIN** [462-8784]; www.austintexas.org) and is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 6pm (closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter). You can pick up tourist information pamphlets downtown at the **Old Bakery and Emporium,** 1006 Congress Ave. (✆ **512/477-5961**), open Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm, and the first two Saturdays in December 10am to 3pm. The **Capitol Visitors Center,** 112 E. 11th St. (✆ **512/305-8400;** www.texascapitolvisitorscenter.com), a Texas Department of Transportation travel center, dispenses information on the entire state; it's open Monday through Saturday 9am to 5pm, Sunday noon to 5pm, and closed major holidays.

For entertainment listings, pick up the free alternative newspaper, the ***Austin Chronicle,*** distributed to stores, hotels, and restaurants around town every Thursday. It's got a close rival in ***XLent,*** the free weekend entertainment guide put out by the city's daily newspaper, *Austin-American Statesman,* which also comes out on Thursday.

**Inside Line** (✆ **512/416-5700**) can clue you in about Austin information from the essential to the esoteric—everything from weather forecasts and restaurant reviews to financial news and bat facts. Dial extension 4636 for instructions on how to use the system.

## CITY LAYOUT

In 1839, Austin was laid out in a grid on the northern shore of the Colorado River, bounded by Shoal Creek to the west and Waller Creek to the east. The section of the river abutting the original settlement is now known as Lady Bird Lake, and the city has spread far beyond its original borders in all directions. The land to the east is flat Texas prairie; the rolling Hill Country begins on the west side of town.

**MAIN ARTERIES & STREETS** I-35, forming the border between central and east Austin, is the main north-south thoroughfare; Loop 1, usually called Mo-Pac (it follows the course of the Missouri-Pacific railroad, although some people like to say it got its name because it's "mo' packed"), is the west-side equivalent. Hwy. 290, running east and west, merges with I-35 where it comes in on the north side of town, briefly reestablishing its separate identity on the south side of town before merging with Hwy. 71 (which is called Ben White Blvd. btw. 183 and Lamar Blvd.). Hwy. 290 and Hwy. 71 split up again in Oak Hill, on the west side of town. Not confused enough yet? Hwy. 2222 changes its name from Koenig to Northland and, west of Loop 360, to Bullcreek, while, in the north, Hwy. 183 is called Research Boulevard. (Looking at a map should make all this clear as mud.) Important north-south city streets include Lamar, Guadalupe, and Burnet. If you want to get across town north of the river, use Cesar Chavez (once known as First St.), 15th Street (which turns into Enfield west of Lamar), Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (the equivalent of 19th St., and often just called MLK), 38th Street, or 45th Street.



## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Although Austin, designed to be the capital of the independent Republic of Texas, has a planned, grand city center similar to that of Washington, D.C., the city has spread out far beyond those original boundaries. These days, with a few exceptions, detailed below, locals tend to speak in terms of landmarks (the University of Texas) or geographical areas (East Austin) rather than neighborhoods.

**Downtown** The original city, laid out by Edwin Waller in 1839, runs roughly north from the Colorado River. The river has been dammed in several places, forming a series of lakes. By downtown, it is called Lady Bird Lake. The first street on the north shore of Town Lake used to be called First Street; now it's called **Cesar Chavez Street.** Downtown extends north up to 11th Street, where the capitol building is. The main north-south street is **Congress Avenue.** It runs from the river to the capitol. Downtown's eastward limit is the I-35 freeway, and its westward limit is Lamar Boulevard. This is a prime sightseeing (it includes the capitol and several historic districts) and hotel area, with music clubs, restaurants, shops, and galleries. There are a lot of clubs on and

around **Sixth Street,** just east of Congress, in the **Warehouse District,** centered on Third and Fourth streets just west of Congress, and in the **Red River District,** on (where else?) Red River, between 6th and 10th streets.

**South Austin** For a long time, not a lot was happening south of Town Lake. This was largely a residential area—a mix of working class and bohemians lived here. **South Congress,** the sleepy stretch of Congress Avenue running through the middle of South Austin, was lined with cheap motels. Then, in the 1980s, it started taking off. The area became attractive to store and restaurant owners who liked the proximity to downtown without the high rents. Trendy shops moved into the old storefronts. Yuppies started buying houses in the adjoining neighborhoods. And now South Austin is one of the preferred places to live. **Fairview Park** and **Travis Heights,** adjoining neighborhoods between Congress and I-35, are perhaps the most popular.

**Central Austin** This is a larger area that includes downtown and the university campus. It's not a precisely defined area. If you were to travel north from Town Lake through the downtown area and past the capitol, you would come across a complex of state government office buildings (btw. 15th and 19th sts.). Past that would be the UT campus (19th to 26th sts.). Farther north, you get to the **Hyde Park** neighborhood (35th to 51st sts.). Hyde Park got its start in 1891 as one of Austin's first planned suburbs; renovation of its Victorian and early Craftsman houses began in the 1970s, and now there's a real neighborhood feel to this pretty, tree-lined area. Beyond Hyde Park numbered streets disappear. You pass through a couple of neighborhoods, and eventually you come to Research Boulevard. For a lot of Austinites, this is where central Austin ends and north Austin begins.

**West Austin** West of Lamar is **Clarksville,** formerly a black community founded in the 1870s by freed slaves. It's now a neighborhood of small, old houses that command high prices. To the west of Clarksville, on the other side of the Mo-Pac Freeway, is a more tony neighborhood called **Tarrytown,** which extends as far as Lake Austin (upstream from downtown, the Colorado river bends around in a more northerly direction, where another dam creates this long, narrow lake).

**East Side** East of I-35 are several neighborhoods, which are predominantly Hispanic and African American. Because it has a central location, this area is gentrifying at a quick pace.

**West Lake** The name denotes the townships that are on the opposite side of Lake Austin from West Austin. This is an affluent suburban area that includes the communities of **Rollingwood** and **Westlake Hills.** If you head upstream to the next dam, you come to Lake Travis, a large lake with lots of marinas and lakeside communities, such as **Lakeway.** But you don't have to live here to play here: This is also where those who live in Central Austin come to splash around and kick back on nice weekends.

**Northwest** This is where most of the high-tech industry is located. It is largely suburban. It includes the Arboretum, a large mall and surrounding shopping area, and a new mall called the Domain. Farther north are the bedroom communities of Round Rock and Cedar Park.

# 2 GETTING AROUND

## BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Austin's public transportation system, **Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority** (www.capmetro.org), operates more than 50 bus routes. A day pass on Metro costs $1.50; express service from various Park & Ride lots costs $3. You'll need exact change or fare tickets (see below) to board the bus. Call ✆ **800/474-1201** or 512/474-1200 (TTY 512/385-5872) from local pay phones for point-to-point routing information.

When moving around downtown and the South Congress area, you can make use of the so-called 'Dillo routes. (This is short for armadillo, which was a symbol of Austin weirdness in the 1970s, before being appropriated by mainstream culture.) These are the buses that look like trolley cars, which are seen in several other cities. Until late 2008 they were free of charge but they now cost 50¢ for a 2-hour pass (no charge with a day pass). The routes were reduced to two. One moves north and south along Congress Avenue from the state capitol across the bridge to Riverside Drive, at the beginning of SoCo district. The other circulates along Sixth Street (west) and Fifth Street (east) for several blocks on either side of Congress Avenue. They run at a frequency of every 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the time of day. They stop running around 6 or 7pm.

In spring 2009, Cap Metro will begin light rail service between downtown and the bedroom communities in the north. This will be of interest to Austin visitors only if they are staying in hotels in north central Austin. The train will travel 32 miles, from downtown Austin to the town of Leander. Along the way it will stop in seven stations. The first two are in east Austin, far from any attractions or hotels. The third station is close to Highland Mall and a couple of hotels in that area. It would be the only station of interest to visitors.



## BY CAR

With its lack of traffic planning, driving in Austin is, to put it mildly, a challenge. Don't fall into a driver's daze anywhere in town; you need to be as vigilant on the city streets as you are on highways. The former are rife with signs that suddenly insist left lane must turn left or right lane must turn right—generally positioned so they're noticeable only when it's too late to switch. A number of major downtown streets are one-way; many don't have street signs or have signs so covered with foliage they're impossible to read. Driving is particularly confusing in the university area, where streets like "32 1/2" suddenly turn up. Multiply the difficulties at night, when you need X-ray vision to read the ill-lit street indicators.

The highways are no more pleasant. I-35—nicknamed "the NAFTA highway" because of the big rigs speeding up from Mexico—is mined with tricky on-and-off ramps and, around downtown, a confusing complex of upper and lower levels; it's easy to miss your exit or find yourself exiting when you don't want to. The rapidly developing area to the northwest, where Hwy. 183 connects I-35 with Mo-Pac and the Capital of Texas Highway, requires particular vigilance, as the connections occur very rapidly. There are regular lane mergers and sudden, precipitous turnoffs.

**PARKING** Unless you have congressional plates, you're likely to find the selection of parking spots downtown extremely limited during the week; as a result, lots of downtown

restaurants offer valet parking (with hourly rates in the range of $4–$6). There are a number of lots around the area, costing anywhere from $5 to $7 per hour, but the most convenient ones tend to fill up quickly. If you're lucky enough to find a metered spot, it'll run you 75¢ per hour, with a 2-hour limit, so bring change. Although there's virtually no street parking available near the capitol before 5pm during the week, there is a free visitor garage on 15th and San Jacinto (2-hr. time limit).

In the university area, trying to find a spot near the shopping strip known as the Drag can be just that. However, cruise the side streets and you're eventually bound to find a pay lot that's not filled. The two most convenient on-campus parking garages are located near San Jacinto and East 26th streets and off 25th Street between San Antonio and Nueces. There's also a (free!) parking lot near the LBJ Library, but it's a good walk from the central campus. Log on to **www.utexas.edu/business/parking/resources** for additional places to drop off your car.

## BY TAXI

The major cab companies in Austin are **Austin Cab** (✆ **512/478-2222**) and **American Yellow Checker Cab** (✆ **512/452-9999**). The flag-drop charge is $2.05, and it's $2.05 for each mile after that. When gas is expensive, taxis will add a fuel surcharge.

### Fast Facts Austin

***American Express*** The branch at 10710 Research Blvd., Ste. 328 (✆ **512/452-8166;** www.americanexpress.com), is open Monday to Friday 9am to 5:30pm, Saturday 10am to 2pm.

***Dentist*** Call the Dental Referral Service at ✆ **800/917-6453.**

***Doctor*** The Medical Exchange (✆ **512/458-1121**) and Seton Hospital (✆ **512/324-4450**) both have physician referral services.

***Drugstores*** You'll find many Walgreens, Eckerd, and Randalls drugstores around the city; most HEB grocery stores also have pharmacies. Several Walgreens are open 24 hours. Have your zip code ready and call ✆ **800/925-4733** to find the Walgreens branch nearest you.

***Emergencies*** Call ✆ **911** if you need the police, the fire department, or an ambulance.

***Hospitals*** **Brackenridge,** 601 E. 15th St. (✆ **512/324-7000**); **St. David's,** 919 E. 32nd St. at I-35 (✆ **512/397-4240**); and **Seton Medical Center,** 1201 W. 38th St. (✆ **512/324-1000**), have good and convenient emergency-care facilities.

***Internet Access*** If you're traveling with your own computer, go to the following website for a list of hot spots: **www.austinwirelesscity.org/hotspot-list.php**. If you don't have a machine, and your hotel can't help you out, you can go to a public library (see the above website for locations) or a local FedEx Office.

***Newspapers & Magazines*** The daily *Austin American-Statesman* (www.austin360.com) is the only large-circulation, mainstream newspaper in town. The *Austin Chronicle* (www.auschron.com), a free alternative weekly, focuses on the arts,

entertainment, and politics. Monday through Friday, the University of Texas publishes the surprisingly sophisticated *Daily Texan* (www.dailytexanonline.com) newspaper, covering everything from on-campus news to international events.

***Police*** The nonemergency number for the Austin Police Department is ✆ **311.**

***Post Office*** The city's main post office is located at 8225 Cross Park Dr. (✆ **512/342-1252**); more convenient to tourist sights are the Capitol Station, 111 E. 17th St., in the LBJ Building, and the Downtown Station, 510 Guadalupe St. For information on other locations, phone ✆ **800/275-8777.**

***Safety*** Austin has been ranked one of the five safest cities in the United States, but that doesn't mean you can throw common sense to the wind. It's never a good idea to walk down dark streets alone at night, and major tourist areas always attract pickpockets, so keep your purse or wallet in a safe place. Although 6th Street itself tends to be busy, use caution on the side streets in the area.

***Taxes*** The tax on hotel rooms is 15%. Sales tax, added to restaurant bills as well as to other purchases, is 8.25%.

***Transit Information*** Call Capital Metro Transit (✆ **800/474-1201** or 512/474-1200 from local pay phones; TTY 512/385-5872).

***Weather*** Check the weather at ✆ **512/451-2424** or www.news8austin.com/content/weather.



## 3 WHERE TO STAY

Unlike San Antonio, Austin doesn't have a huge pool of downtown hotel rooms dependent on large conventions, so it can sometimes be difficult to find a discounted room downtown. When you look on the Internet for bargains, you're more often than not pointed toward properties in the southeast corner of the city near the intersection of I-35 and Hwy. 71, where a large number of properties sit. This location is not a good choice for exploring the city, but the difference in rates may be too good to pass up.

You'll get a far better feel for what makes Austin special if you stay somewhere in central Austin. The verdant Town Lake area includes both downtown near the capitol and the resurgent South Congress area. The areas near the University of Texas, including west campus and the Hyde Park neighborhood, are ideal for those willing to trade some modern perks for homeyness and character. Those with a penchant for playing on the water or putting around should consider holing up near the lakes and golf courses to the west.

Austin has some glitzy high-rises but only a few historic hotels, so if it's character you're after, you should opt for a B&B. For an Austin B&B that belongs to Historic Accommodations of Texas, check the website at www.hat.org.

Most hotels catering to business travelers often offer weekend discounts and, of course, corporate discounts. In the past couple of years, weekend discounts have not been common for the downtown hotels, but that might change with the slowdown in discretionary

travel. It's a good idea to call the toll-free number and the hotel itself, because sometimes the central reservation agent doesn't know about local deals. Please note that rates listed below do not include the city's 15% hotel sales tax.

## DOWNTOWN

### Very Expensive

**The Driskill ★★★** Opened in 1886, the Driskill is Austin's original grand hotel. It has seen its share of history and is a national historic landmark. Lyndon Johnson managed the final days of his 1964 presidential campaign from here and received the election results here. The Daughters of the Republic of Texas met here to form a plan to save the Alamo. It was here, too, that the Texas Rangers plotted their ambush on Bonnie and Clyde. Indeed, all kinds of plots have been hatched here.

The hotel has weathered ups and downs. Right now it's up. An expensive renovation project put the "grand" back into the hotel. All public areas have been refurbished to give them an impressive old-and-expensive look. The Driskill offers guests a choice between rooms in the original 1886 building (labeled "historic") and those in the 1928 addition ("traditional"); the latter are the better deal, especially those on the 12th floor, which have higher ceilings. Rooms are well lit, distinctively decorated, and furnished with period pieces. Bathrooms in many rooms are on the small side but are sleek and attractive and come with several amenities, including plush bathrobes. This hotel is on Austin's lively Sixth Street, and some of the "historic" rooms with balconies can catch street noise. Also, some of the traditional king rooms are small. In 2008, the Driskill spent $4 million to refurnish the rooms, including replacing all mattresses and installing flatscreen televisions. In this same year it was awarded the Five Dog Bone Award for pet-friendliness by the readers of *Animal Fair* magazine. The hotel has only a handful of smoking rooms.

604 Brazos St. (at E. 6th St.), Austin, TX 78701. ✆ **800/252-9367** or 512/474-5911. Fax 512/474-2214. www.driskillhotel.com. 188 units. $250–$340 double; suites from $465. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. Pets under 25 lb. accepted with $50 fee per pet per stay. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; health club; spa; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, free Wi-Fi, hair dryer, safe.

**Four Seasons Austin ★★★** Kids This member of the well-known luxury chain has an ideal location on the north shore of Town Lake, with great views and close proximity to all the downtown hot spots. Large, comfortable rooms, an excellent spa, beautifully manicured grounds, and direct access to Austin's Hike and Bike Trail are just a few reasons for staying here. And, of course, there's the famous Four Seasons service, which sets this hotel apart from others. No place in Austin can make life easier.

The look of the place is part modern, part traditional, and part Texas: polished stone floors, with plush area rugs, deep easy chairs and sofas, and a smattering of Western art. It's a seamless blend in muted tones, without anything calling attention to itself. It's a look that has much in common with many other luxury hotels I've seen. These hotels obviously know the tastes of their clientele, but to my eye, the interiors lacks character. I think of it as contemporary design on Valium. The guest rooms have the same feel. They are plush and conservative. The city views are fine, but the ones of the lake are finer still. You can choose between rooms with balconies and rooms without.

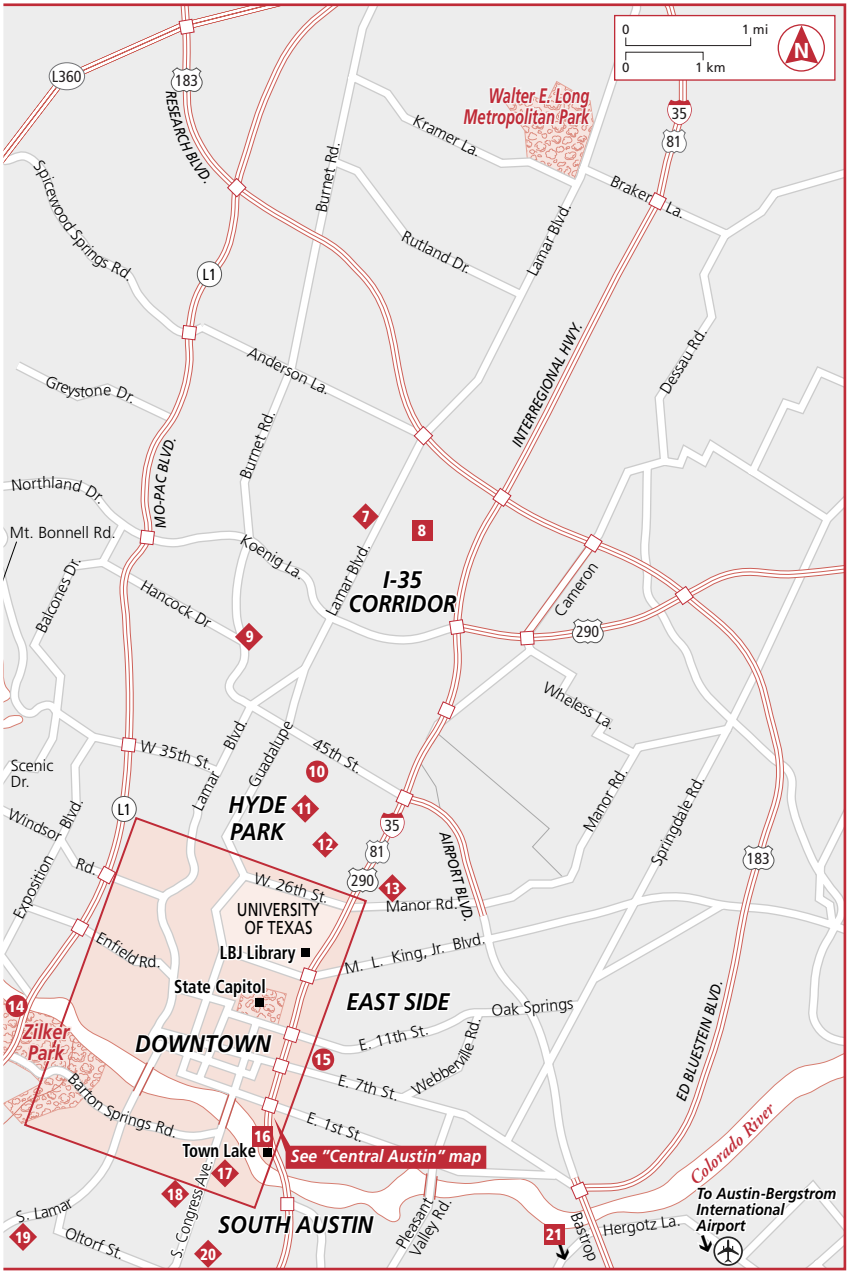
# Greater Austin Accommodations, Dining & Attractions

**ACCOMMODATIONS** ■
Habitat Suites **8**
Hilton Austin Airport **21**
Holiday Inn Austin Town Lake **16**
Lake Austin Spa Resort **1**

**DINING** ◆
County Line on the Hill **4**
Curra's Grill **20**
Fonda San Miguel **9**
Hoover's **13**
Hudson's on the Bend **2**
Hyde Park Bar and Grill **12**
Matt's El Rancho **19**
Mother's Cafe & Garden **11**
The Oasis **3**
The Salt Lick **5**
Threadgill's **7**
Vespaio & Enoteca Vespaio **18**
Zen **17**

**ATTRACTIONS** ●
Austin Nature and Science Center **14**
Elisabet Ney Museum **10**
French Legation Museum **15**
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center **6**

NORTHWEST
Bull Creek Rd.
City Park Rd.
Emma Long Metropolitan Park
Colorado River
CAPITAL OF TEXAS HWY.
L360
WESTLAKE HILLS
Westlake Dr.
Toro Canyon Dr.
Wild Basin Wilderness Park
Red Bud Trail
Bee Creek Preserve
Bee Caves Rd.
ROLLINGWOOD
Barton Creek
MO-PAC BLVD.
L1
Gus Fruh Dist. Park
1
2
3
4
5
6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N
L360
183
RESEARCH BLVD.
Spicewood Springs Rd.
L1
Burnet Rd.
Kramer La.
Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park
35
81
Braker La.
Rutland Dr.
Lamar Blvd.
INTERREGIONAL HWY.
Dessau Rd.
Anderson La.
Greystone Dr.
MO-PAC BLVD.
Burnet Rd.
Northland Dr.
Mt. Bonnell Rd.
Balcones Dr.
Koenig La.
Hancock Dr.
Lamar Blvd.
7
8
I-35 CORRIDOR
9
Cameron
290
Wheless La.
W 35th St.
Lamar Blvd.
Guadalupe
45th St.
10
Scenic Dr.
HYDE PARK
11
12
Windsor Rd.
Exposition Blvd.
35
81
290
13
Manor Rd.
AIRPORT BLVD.
Manor Rd.
Springdale Rd.
183
W. 26th St.
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
LBJ Library
Enfield Rd.
M. L. King, Jr. Blvd.
State Capitol
EAST SIDE
14
Zilker Park
DOWNTOWN
Oak Springs
E. 11th St.
15
E. 7th St.
Webberville Rd.
ED BLUESTEIN BLVD.
Barton Springs Rd.
E. 1st St.
16
Town Lake
See "Central Austin" map
Colorado River
17
18
S. Congress Ave.
S. Lamar
19
Oltorf St.
20
SOUTH AUSTIN
Pleasant Valley Rd.
21
Bastrop
Hergotz La.
To Austin-Bergstrom International Airport

If you're traveling with toddlers, the staff can provide necessary gear like strollers and baby seats, and there are plenty of weekend activities. For older kids there are complimentary things such as popcorn and soda or milk and cookies if you notify the hotel when you make your reservations.

98 San Jacinto Blvd. (at 1st/Cesar Chavez St.), Austin, TX 78701. ✆ **800/332-3442** or 512/478-4500. Fax 512/478-3117. www.fourseasons.com/austin. 291 units. $320–$480 double; suites from $570. Lower rates on weekends; spa packages available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25. Pets no taller than 12–15 in. accepted; advance notice to reservations department required. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor heated saltwater pool; health club; spa; concierge; tours; car-rental desk; town car; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

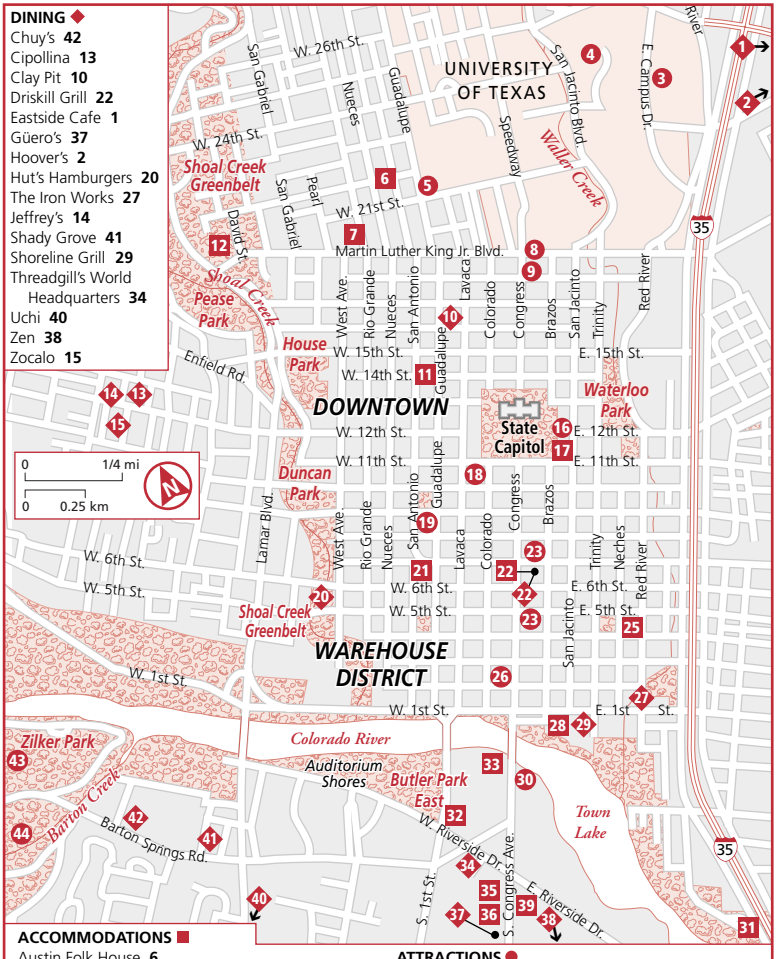
**Hyatt Regency Austin on Town Lake** ★★ Austin's Hyatt Regency brings the outdoors indoors, with its signature atrium lobby anchored by a Hill Country tableau of a limestone-banked flowing stream, waterfalls, and oak trees. It's impressive. The hotel sits on Town Lake's south shore (okay, strictly speaking, this is South Austin, but its size and feel are downtown traits). The north-facing rooms have lake vistas with the downtown skyscrapers as a backdrop. The wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities makes this hotel a good choice. Bat tours and other Town Lake excursions depart from a private dock, where you can also rent paddle boats and canoes. In addition, guests can rent mountain bikes to ride on the hike-and-bike trail outside the door. Rooms have recently been remodeled. They have good beds and a modern-functional look that is comfortable and seems geared more to the business traveler. Those on higher floors facing Town Lake are the most coveted.

208 Barton Springs Rd. (at S. Congress), Austin, TX 78704. ✆ **800/233-1234** or 512/477-1234. Fax 512/480-2069. www.hyatt.com. 446 units. $199–$314 double; $450–$650 suite. Weekend specials, corporate and government rates available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $18; self-parking $12. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; health club; Jacuzzi; bike rentals; business center; room service; laundry service/dry cleaning; club-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## Expensive

**Doubletree Guest Suites Austin** ★ Kids Lobbyists sock in for winter legislative sessions at this tony all-suites high-rise, a stone's throw from the state capitol. It would be hard to find more comfortable temporary quarters. At 625 square feet, the standard one-bedroom suites are larger than a typical New York apartment, and all are decorated in attractive Western style with Texas details, offering cushy foldout sofas, large mirrored closets, and spacious bathrooms. Many rooms have small balconies with capital capitol views, and the windows open. Full-size appliances with all the requisite cookware allow guests to prepare meals in comfort. Obviously, these suites with kitchens appeal to families with mouths to feed, but beyond that, the sturdy and practical way the rooms are furnished and decorated seems particularly apt for people with younger kids.

303 W. 15th St. (at Guadalupe), Austin, TX 78701. ✆ **800/222-TREE** (222-8733) or 512/478-7000. Fax 512/478-3562. www.doubletree.com. 189 units. 1-bedroom suite $169–$219; 2-bedroom suite $229–$309. Corporate, extended-stay, Internet, and other discounts available. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $15; self-parking $10. Pets less than 25 lb. accepted for $25 per day. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; business center; secretarial services; Wi-Fi in public areas; room service; coin-op laundry; laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, high-speed Internet access, full-size kitchen, hair dryer, iron.

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**Hilton Austin** This recently built hotel directly across from the convention center fills up with conventiongoers when one is in town, but gives discounts when this is not the case. Despite being relatively new, the hotel is already refreshing the rooms with new paint jobs and carpets—a good sign that the property is being kept up. The new paint and carpeting also add a bit of character to what is fairly bland decor. Regular rooms are a tad small. Bathrooms are okay for the price category and offer plenty of amenities. When considering this hotel, remember that it's a convention hotel 1 block off Sixth Street, which means that you might hear some partying going on in the room next door or out on the street. There is a $10 charge for using the hotel's health club and about as much again for high-speed Internet access, which is common in a lot of business hotels.

500 E. 4th St., Austin, TX 78701. ✆ **800/HILTONS** (445-8667) or 512/482-8000. Fax 512/486-0078. www.hilton.com. 447 units. $189–$384 double; suites from $550. Weekend and online specials. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $25; self-parking $16. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; coffee shop; heated outdoor pool; health club; business center; room service; laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## Moderate

**Holiday Inn Austin Town Lake** Kids The most upscale Holiday Inn in Austin, this high-rise hotel is situated on the north shore of Lady Bird Lake, at the edge of downtown, and just off I-35. Many of the units have sofa sleepers, which can work for families, especially since kids stay free (and if they're 11 and under, eat free at the hotel restaurant too). Other amenities include a rooftop pool large enough for lap swimming, happy-hour specials, and a big-screen TV in the lounge. The hotel underwent a thorough renovation in 2007. Furniture and appliances were changed out in the guest rooms, and the fitness center was reequipped. This is a nonsmoking hotel.

20 N. I-35 (exit 233, Riverside Dr./Town Lake), Austin, TX 78701. ✆ **800/HOLIDAY** (465-4329) or 512/472-8211. Fax 512/472-4636. www.holiday-inn.com/austintownlake. 320 units. $129–$199 double. Weekend and holiday rates, corporate discounts. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $12. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; exercise room; business center; secretarial services; Wi-Fi; room service; coin-op laundry; laundry service/dry cleaning; executive floors. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**La Quinta Inn–Capitol** Value Finds Practically on the grounds of the state capitol, this is a great bargain for both business and leisure travelers. Rooms are more attractive than those in your typical motel: TVs are large; the rich-toned furnishings are far from cheesy; and perks such as free local phone calls (on dataport phones with voice mail), free high-speed Internet access, and free continental breakfasts keep annoying extras off your bill. The sole drawback is the lack of a restaurant on the premises. But there's a 'Dillo stop on 11th Street, a half-block from the hotel, and an increasing number of area restaurants are staying open on the weekends; getting in a car is less necessary than it once was.

300 E. 11th St. (at San Jacinto), Austin, TX 78701. ✆ **800/NU-ROOMS** (687-6667) or 512/476-1166. Fax 512/476-6044. www.lq.com. 150 units. $119–$175 double; $185–$210 suite. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $13. Pets accepted (no deposit or extra fee). **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movie, high-speed Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## SOUTH AUSTIN

### Very Expensive

**Hotel Saint Cecilia ★★★** (Finds) This small hotel is a new favorite. The owner, Liz Lambert, of the Hotel San José (see below), added a few bungalows at the low end of the property beside a pool. Each has an upstairs and a do wnstairs suite. Another building stands beside the original house. I t holds the br eakfast and bar ar ea and thr ee guest rooms. Separating it from the street is a gorgeous landscaped yard set off by large old oak trees. The original house (1888) is at the opposite side of the pr operty from the bungalows. From the outside it looks the same, but the floor plan was tw eaked to cr eate five large suites. These vary gr eatly, and in each ther e's a differ ent emphasis (in one it 's the bathroom, in another it's the bedroom, in another it's the garden).

All but one of the hotel's rooms are oversize. They are designed in a fresh and pleasing manner with clean lines and attractive spaces. Each has its own outdoor porch, patio, or garden. Each comes with a turntable connected to a G eneva sound system (with vintage vinyl collection at the r eception). But the r eal difference maker is that each r oom has a Swedish-made Hästens mattress, made of all-natural materials, that feels like nothing I've ever experienced.

112 Academy Dr. (a block east of S. C ongress Ave.), Austin, TX 78704. ✆ **512/852-2400.** Fax 512/852-2401. www.hotelsaintcecilia.com. 14 units. $300–$540 double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free secure off-street parking. Pets under 25 lb. accepted with $25 fee per pet per stay. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; c oncierge; laundry ser vice/dry cleaning. *In r oom:* A/C, TV/DVD, fr ee Wi-Fi and high-speed I nternet ac cess, sound sy stem, w et bar (in most r ooms), minibar, fridge , hair dr yer, ir on upon request.

### Expensive

**Hotel San José ★★** This revamped 1930s motor cour t gets a lot of attention fr om the national press for its design, which weds beauty to simplicity. The San José is a good choice for design enthusiasts and hipsters, who will enjo y staying at a hotel that doesn 't feel like other hotels and that also is par t of the social scene in S outh A ustin. O ther travelers may think that the minimalist rooms are overpriced. Even if you don't stay here, you might enjoy coming here in the late afternoon/early evening and enjoy the comfortable surroundings of the hotel's popular beer-and-wine bar. The rooms are indeed spare and come furnished with beds and chairs made from Texas pine, but they also come with things like CD players. Most rooms have pleasant, small outdoor sitting areas. The design achieves a certain serenity that evaporates the moment you step out on to South Congress Avenue with its lively street scene. Right across the way is the famous Continental Club, a great place to check out for happy hour. Book a room in the back to avoid the Congress Avenue traffic noise.

1316 S. Congress Ave. (south of Nelly, about 1/2 mile south of R iverside), Austin, TX 78704. ✆ **800/574-8897** or 512/444-7322. F ax 512/444-7362. w ww.sanjosehotel.com. 40 units . $100–$110 double with shared bathroom; $180–$280 double with private bathroom; $300–$400 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Dogs ac cepted for $10 per dog per da y. **Amenities:** Bar/lounge; c offee shop; out door pool; bike rentals; breakfast-only room service; laundry service/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, CD player, free Wi-Fi, hair dryer.

### Inexpensive

**Austin Motel ★** (Value) This is the best lodging bargain on S outh Congress. It's one of the old motels that was built on S outh Congress when this was the main r oad to San Antonio. The motel was built in 1938 and has been in the hands of the same family since

the 1950s. A convenient (but not quiet) location in the heart of SoCo and great rates make this place very popular. It's got a classic kidney-shaped pool, a great neon sign, free HBO, free coffee in the lobby, and a certain quirkiness to it that's part of the local charm. It's also got one of those rarities: real single rooms, so those traveling on their own don't have to pay for a bed they're not sleeping in. All rooms are different. Many are decorated with murals. For instance, room no. 257 has a cactus mural. You can check out the rooms before you make a reservation by going to the website, which has pictures of all of them.

1220 S. Congress St., Austin, TX 78704. ✆ **512/441-1157.** Fax 512/441-1157. www.austinmotel.com. 41 units. $70–$96 single; $87–$96 double; $110–$119 poolside and deluxe; $146 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Limited number of rooms for pets; one-time $15 fee. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, fridge (in some rooms), hair dryer, iron, safe (in some rooms).

## CENTRAL

### Expensive

**Mansion at Judges Hill ★★** All the rooms in this boutique hotel are furnished and decorated with much more character than you'll find at any of the local chain hotels. This is as true of the rooms in the modern building at the rear of the property as it is for the ones in the original mansion. The rooms that are the most fun are the second-story signature rooms, which all open onto a sweeping upstairs porch and have tall ceilings and large bathrooms with special amenities (including L'Occitane toiletries and bathrobes). Beds have particularly good mattresses and linens. The third-floor rooms are a little smaller, but lovely and with a real feel of the old house. The ground floor holds the bar and the restaurant.

The modern building is called the North Wing. Built in 1983 in the rear of the property, it offers rooms far from the traffic sounds coming from MLK. The rooms vary quite a bit. Most come without tubs. The deluxe king rooms are the nicest (particularly room no. 212). All rooms are nonsmoking. The West Campus location is convenient to the university and to downtown.

1900 Rio Grande (at MLK Blvd./19th St.), Austin, TX 78705. ✆ **800/311-1619** or 512/495-1800. www.judgeshill.com. 48 units. $169–$229 North Wing; $189–$299 Mansion. Rates go higher for special events. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. Pets accepted with restrictions. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; limited room service; in-room massage; babysitting; limited laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, CD player, Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.



## It Pays to Stay

Two downtown accommodations at prime locations will save you money. **Extended Stay America Downtown,** 600 Guadalupe (at 6th St.), Austin, TX 78701 (✆ **800/EXT-STAY** [398-7829] or 512/457-9994; www.extstay.com), and **Homestead Studio Suites Austin–Downtown/Town Lake,** 507 S. First St. (at Barton Springs), Austin, TX 78704 (✆ **888/782-9473** or 512/476-1818; www.homesteadhotels.com), will run you from $400 to $500 per week for a room. Full kitchens and coin-op laundries at both bring your costs down even more.

## Kids Family-Friendly Hotels

**Doubletree Guest Suites** (p. 310) and **Habitat Suites** (p. 316) That "suites" in the name of these properties says it all. These accommodations offer spacious not-in-your-face quarters, plus the convenience (and economy) of kitchen facilities, so you don't have to eat out all the time.

**Four Seasons Austin** (p. 307) Tell the reservations clerk that you're traveling with kids, and you'll be automatically enrolled in the free amenities program, which offers age-appropriate snacks— cookies and milk for children 9 and under, popcorn and soda for those older—along with various toys and games that will be waiting for you when you arrive. And you don't have to travel with all your gear because the hotel will provide such items as a car seat, stroller, playpen, bedrails, disposable pacifiers, a baby bathtub, shampoo, powder and lotions, bib, bottle warmers, and disposable diapers.

**Holiday Inn Austin Town Lake** (p. 312) You're near lots of the outdoor play areas at Town Lake, and kids stay and (11 and under) eat free. It's hard to beat that!

## Moderate

**Austin Folk House** ★★ Value You get the best of both worlds at this appealing B&B where old-time charm is combined with new plumbing. When it was transformed from a tired apartment complex at the beginning of this millennium, this 1880s house near the University of Texas got a complete interior overhaul, but maintained such integral traditional assets as the comfy front porch. The sunny rooms have cheerfully painted walls and the wiring to accommodate megachannel cable TVs, private phone lines, broadband cable access, and radio/alarms with white-noise machines. At the same time, nice antiques and such amenities as fancy bedding and towels, candles, robes, expensive lotions, and soaps make you feel like you're in a small luxury inn. The lavish breakfast buffet served in a dining room decorated with the folk art for which the B&B is named does nothing to dispel that idea. Prices are reasonable for all this, while the free off-street parking, near the heart of UT, puts this place at a premium all by itself. Local phone calls are gratis.

506 W. 22nd St. (at Nueces), Austin, TX 78705. ✆ **866/472-6700** or 512/472-6700. www.austinfolkhouse.com. 9 units. $110–$225 double. Internet specials sometimes available. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Wi-Fi in public areas; video library. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, Wi-Fi, high-speed Internet access, hair dryer, iron.

**Carrington's Bluff** ★ This B&B has an interesting location at the end of a quiet street near the University of Texas. What makes it interesting and gives it a sense of isolation is that it sits on a wooded rise well above Shoal Creek and Lamar Boulevard. Built in 1877, the house exhibits plenty of country charm, and there's not a whiff of preciousness about the place. The antiques-filled rooms—five in the main house, three in a 1920 cottage across the street—keep business as well as leisure travelers happy. Both houses offer access to full kitchens, including refrigerators stocked with Bluebell ice cream—and porches where you can sit out with a bowl of it.

1900 David St. (at 22nd St.), Austin, TX 78705. ✆ **888/290-6090** or 512/479-0638. www.carringtonsbluff.com. 8 units. $105–$189 double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Habitat Suites** ★★ Kids Finds This hotel, located in one of the satellite buildings of Highland Mall, is an island of ecological awareness in a sea of mainstream commercialism. It was converted into a green hotel in 1991, to use natural materials and cleaning products over synthetics and chemicals; save, and even generate, electricity; recycle materials; conserve water; grow organic foods; and act in a socially conscious manner. For the guests it means never running the risk of getting a room that reeks of chemicals. It is the ideal lodging for anyone with chemical sensitivities. It also means friendly service—the hotel staff has bought into the green concept and even enjoys a profit-sharing arrangement; consequently, the staff retention rate is way above the industry average. Staying here also means healthful food choices for breakfast (but not to the exclusion of regular fare), and if you decide to cook for yourself, you can make use of some of the organically grown vegetables, when available. All of these green activities are performed without fanfare, though the hotel quietly piles up awards for its eco-consciousness. Rooms are oversize and come with complete kitchens. Sheets and towels are of natural materials. Paints are water-based. The furniture, though not of the latest style, is comfortable (pieces are refinished or reupholstered to avoid adding to the waste stream). Each room has a small separate outdoor area with chairs. The location is central, just 2 miles north of the university campus. It's not noisy, and the hotel institutes quiet hours between 9pm and 9am.

500 E. Highland Mall Blvd. (take exit 222 off I-35 to Airport Blvd., take a right to Highland Mall Blvd.), Austin, TX 78752. ✆ **800/535-4663** or 512/467-6000. Fax 512/467-6000. www.habitatsuites.com. 96 units. $147 1-bedroom suite; $207 2-bedroom suite. Extended-stay rates available. Rates include full breakfast and (Mon–Fri) afternoon wine and snacks. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; Wi-Fi in public areas; coin-op laundry; environmentally sound dry-cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi and some w/high-speed Internet access, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.



## WESTLAKE/LAKE TRAVIS

### Very Expensive

**Lake Austin Spa Resort** ★★★ If you had to create the quintessential Austin spa, it would be laid-back, be located on a serene body of water, offer lots of outdoor activities, and feature superhealthy food that lives up to high culinary standards. You can check off every item of that wish list here. The spa takes advantage of its proximity to the Highland Lakes and the Hill Country by offering such activities as combination canoe/hiking trips and excursions to view the wildflowers. The aromatic ingredients for soothing spa treatments like a honey-mango scrub are grown in the resort's garden, also the source for the herbs used at mealtimes. Guest rooms, many in cottages with private gardens, fireplaces, and hot tubs, are casually elegant, with all-natural fabrics and locally crafted furniture.

This resort is a destination spa. In 2008, the readers of *Condé Nast* gave it the top spot on their favorite spa list, and the editors of *Travel + Leisure* perennially include it in their list of the world's top spas. If you go, you'll see why. It's simply an incredibly relaxing experience, with a winning combination of beauty; a welcoming, knowledgeable staff; and delicious, healthful food.

1705 S. Quinlan Park Rd. (5 miles south of Hwy. 620), Austin, TX 78732. ✆ **800/847-5637** or 512/372-7300. Fax 512/266-1572. www.lakeaustin.com. 40 units. 3-day packages available for $1,550 per person (assuming double occupancy). Rates include all meals, classes, and activities. Spa treatments/personal trainers are extra. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Dogs accepted in Garden Cottage rooms; $250 pet guest fee. Children 14 and up only. **Amenities:** Restaurant; indoor pool; 2 outdoor pools; health club; spa; kayaks; canoes; hydrobikes; room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, CD player, dataport, Wi-Fi, hair dryer.

## AT THE AIRPORT

### Moderate

**Hilton Austin Airport ★** This Hilton's circular shape gives Austin's only full-service airport hotel, formerly the headquarters of Bergstrom Air Force Base, a distinctively modern look. Although the hotel retains few of the features that made it one of three bunkers where the President of the United States might be spirited in the event of a nuclear attack, the building remains rock solid—and blissfully soundproof. (If you stay here, ask for a sheet that details the fascinating history of "The Donut," which also served as a strategic air command center during the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and Desert Storm.) These days, the dome serves as a skylight for a bright and airy lobby. The theme throughout is Texas Hill Country with lots of limestone and wood and plenty of live plants for good measure. Large, comfortable rooms are equipped with all the amenities.

9515 New Airport Dr. (½ mile from the airport, 2 miles east of the intersection of Hwy. 183 and Hwy. 71), Austin, TX 78719. ✆ **800/445-8667** or 512/385-6767. Fax 512/385-6763. www.hilton.com. 263 units. $139–$199 double; suites from $190. Weekend, online, and parking discounts. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking $15; self-parking $11. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; outdoor pool; health club; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service/dry cleaning; club-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.



## 4 WHERE TO DINE

The Austin dining scene has a preponderance of barbecue and Tex-Mex joints, but other cuisines are well represented. Many restaurants are concentrated in and around downtown and the area immediately south of Lady Bird Lake. In other parts of the city, they tend to set up along the major commercial corridors, but in some old neighborhoods a few restaurants will be tucked away in small clusters on fairly quiet streets. These are some of the most interesting of local restaurants.

## DOWNTOWN

### Very Expensive

**Driskill Grill ★★** NEW AMERICAN The dining room, softly lit and reminiscent of a prosperous *fin de siècle,* amounts to a calming and inviting escape from the trying times of the present. And it makes the perfect setting for enjoying a leisurely, sumptuous dinner. The cooking here doesn't shy away from rich ingredients as some other versions of New American cooking do. The menu changes seasonally, but dishes representative of what you might find include the following: prawns with bits of grilled chorizo, charred tomatoes, corn butter, and coriander; charred beef tenderloin with jumbo shrimp and black truffle potato purée; and a cinnamon-dusted duck breast with whipped artichokes

and Savoy cabbage. As might be expected from the restaurant's name, there are always offerings from the grill—venison, pork, beef, and seafood. At the end you'll want to linger a little longer with a snifter of cognac, especially if you've come to town with an expense account.

604 Brazos St., in the Driskill. ✆ **512/391-7162.** www.driskillgrill.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $35–$48; 3-course prix fixe $55 per person; 5-course tasting menu $85, $135 with wine pairings. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 5–9:30pm.

## Expensive

**Shoreline Grill** ★★ SEAFOOD/NEW AMERICAN Fish is the prime lure at this tony grill, which looks out over Town Lake and the Congress Avenue Bridge from beside the Four Seasons hotel. From late spring to early fall, many patrons come to catch a view of the bats taking flight from beneath the bridge. Thousands of Mexican free-tailed bats emerge in unison at dusk, and patio tables for viewing the phenomenon are at a premium.

When they're not admiring the view, diners focus on such starters as semolina-crusted oysters or venison chorizo quesadillas. Drum, or redfish, is a delicate, meaty fish from the Gulf and is worth trying if it's on the menu. And you can't go wrong with the salmon roasted on a plank of alder wood and served with a cilantro beurre blanc. Nonseafood dishes include Parmesan-crusted chicken with penne pasta and prime rib with horseradish potatoes. This restaurant has been in existence for 20 years and attracts a crowd of regulars with many old Austin-establishment types. The no-nonsense dining room has comfortable furniture and white tablecloths. The high ceilings and tall windows give it an airy feel.

98 San Jacinto Blvd. ✆ **512/477-3300.** www.shorelinegrill.com. Reservations recommended (patio seating can't be guaranteed, but requests are taken). Main courses $16–$39. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–10pm; Sat–Sun 5–10pm.

## Moderate

**Clay Pit** ★ (Value) INDIAN The old building that houses this restaurant had been a saloon for many years dating back to the 1870s. The thick limestone walls and rough wood floors show their age. The proportions of the large room still bring to mind the old saloon. But oh how the custom and wares have changed! The Clay Pit is known for Indian cooking with a bit of a twist. A good example is the starter of perfectly cooked coriander calamari served with a piquant cilantro aioli. For an entree, consider *khuroos-e-tursh,* baked chicken breast stuffed with nuts, mushrooms, and onions and smothered in a cashew-almond cream sauce. Or try one of the many dazzling vegetarian dishes.

At night the dining room is softly lit, creating an attractive and romantic setting for dates or special occasions. During the day it's something quite different—a place to grab a quick lunch from the buffet of typical Indian standards. The restaurant is located near the courthouse and the state office buildings just north of the capitol, so it gets a fair number of office workers. Keep this in mind should you get hungry while touring either the capitol or the university campus.

1601 Guadalupe St. ✆ **512/322-5131.** www.claypit.com. Reservations recommended. $6.95 lunch buffet; main courses $10–$16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm and 5–10pm (till 11pm on Fri); Sat noon–3pm and 5–11pm.

## Inexpensive

**Hut's Hamburgers** (Value) AMERICAN This classic burger shack is very Austin. It opened its doors as Sammie's Drive-In in 1939, serving the traditional-style Texas burger

with lettuce and onions. Now it offers 19 types of burgers, including a vegetarian garden burger (which is very Austin, too). As you might expect, you can also get fries and shakes, the usual burger complements, but, for those who enjoy onion rings, this place is a special treat. Also on the menu are blue-plate specials of meatloaf, chicken-fried steak, and fried catfish. The decor is sports pennants and '50s memorabilia.

807 W. 6th St. ✆ **512/472-0693.** Sandwiches and burgers $5–$8; plates $8–$9. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

**The Iron Works** ★ BARBECUE Some of the best barbecue in Austin is served in one of the most unusual settings. Until 1977, this building housed the ironworks of the Weigl family, who came over from Germany in 1913. You can see their ornamental craft all around town, including at the state capitol. Cattle brands created for Jack Benny ("Lasting 39"), Lucille Ball, and Bob Hope are displayed in front of the restaurant. The beef ribs are the most popular order, with the brisket running a close second. Lean turkey breast and juicy chicken are also smoked to perfection.

100 Red River (at E. 1st St.). ✆ **800/669-3602** or 512/478-4855. www.ironworksbbq.com. Reservations accepted for large parties only. Sandwiches $3–$5; plates $6–$12; by the lb. $5–$11. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–9pm.

## SOUTH AUSTIN

### Expensive

**Uchi** ★★★ ASIAN/JAPANESE Chef/owner Tyson Cole is getting lots of recognition for his inventive Japanese food. Three years ago he was named one of America's best new chefs by *Food & Wine* magazine. He loves to play with ingredients Texans are familiar with to create Asian dishes that are beautifully presented and exciting to Austin's tastes. His Uchiviche—citrus-marinated whitefish and salmon mixed with tomato, peppers, cilantro, and chiles—will make a believer out of you. It's not only the seafood that gets the culinary crossover treatment: Brie, pumpkin, shiitake mushrooms, and asparagus are among the food items that you can order tempura-style. And the skewered kobe beef should satisfy those who eschew vegetables and fish. Choose from a long list of cold sakes—especially the rare upmarket brands—for the perfect complement. The space, a converted 1930s bungalow done up in Asian reds and blacks, is at once dramatic and spare.

801 S. Lamar Blvd. ✆ **512/916-4808.** www.uchiaustin.com. Reservations accepted (and strongly recommended) for Mon–Thurs 5:30–9pm and Fri–Sat 5:30–6:30pm. Main courses $15–$30; sushi (per piece) $3–$5; sashimi, hot and cold plates $5–$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm.

**Vespaio & Enoteca Vespaio** ★ ITALIAN Austin isn't really known for its Italian food, but when Austinites want Italian, this is their preferred destination. Vespaio's swanked-up old storefront with lots of exposed brick and glass is an elegant setting, and the food is worth waiting for—but you can drop quite a bit of dough on expensive wines while you're doing so. Your best bet is to get an order of the crispy calamari (they're huge) while you're waiting for a table. The spaghetti alla carbonara is super, as is the veal scaloppine with mushrooms. Many come for the pizza. Try the *boscaiola,* topped with wild boar sausage and Cambozola cheese. Among the 10 chalkboard specials offered nightly, the mixed meat and seafood grills are usually top-notch. It's important to note that reservations are limited to off-peak hours and days (see below).

Next door is the Enoteca, which is more informal, is a bit less expensive, and offers lighter fare. It's open for lunch and dinner. The dining room is a little more cramped but is a very attractive space, perfect for an afternoon coffee, a panini, or a glass of wine.

 There's a small outdoor patio, too. One of the starters served here is a plate of crispy fried risotto balls filled with fontina. There's a small cold case filled with Italian delicacies for those interested in taking something back to the hotel room.

1610 S. Congress Ave. ✆ **512/441-6100.** www.austinvespaio.com. Reservations accepted for Sun–Thurs 5:30–6:30pm only. Pizzas and pastas $14–$21; main courses $17–$28. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10:30pm (bar 5pm–midnight). **Enoteca** ✆ **512/441-7672.** Reservations not accepted. Pizzas and pastas $12–$16. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 9am–3pm.

## Moderate

**Curra's Grill** ★★ Kids MEXICAN This plain, unassuming restaurant has a strong local following for its large menu of interior Mexican dishes and moderate prices. The tortillas are handmade. The Mexican tamales (not the kind usually served in Texas) come in several flavors and are quite good, with moist, spongy *masa.* You can build your own enchiladas from a selection of sauces and fillings—I like the *mole* and the *chile pasilla.* The Yucatecan *cochinita pibil* (pork baked in a marinade of *achiote,* sour orange, and herbs and spices) is tender and complex. The *pescado veracruzano* is fish baked in a sauce of tomatoes, onions, olives, and capers. It's a bit different from the dish as it is served in its home of Veracruz, but great nonetheless. There are also a lot of Tex-Mex options, such as the tostadas, which come piled high with lettuce and crumbled fresh cheese. For dessert, the flan can't be beat.

614 E. Oltorf. ✆ **512/444-0012.** Reservations recommended for large parties. Main courses $8–$17. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

**Güero's** ★ Kids TEX-MEX This is one of the main hangouts on South Congress. It occupies an old feed store that dates from the time when South Austin was a low-rent area at the margins of the city. The restaurant has retained as much of the old feed store as it could, capturing the feel of homey informality that Austinites love. Floors of worn wood and stained cement, brick walls coated in old, faded paint, tall ceilings, tin roof, cheap tables and chairs—it's welcoming and friendly. It's also popular, and noisy when crowded. I like it best during off-hours. The restaurant makes its own tortillas by hand for dishes such as tacos (and the tacos *al pastor,* served Mexican style on small tortillas, folded around deliciously seasoned, grilled pork with pineapple, onion, and cilantro, are one of the dishes this place is known for). Lots of people come for the queso. I like the chicken breast marinated in *achiote* and Mexican oregano, which can be served on a salad, in enchiladas, or in tacos. If you're trying to get your vegetables, the spinach enchiladas will work. Otherwise, go with some of the Tex-Mex combo plates. None of the food is particularly spicy.

1412 S. Congress. ✆ **512/447-7688.** www.guerostacobar.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $7–$19. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–11pm; Sat–Sun 8am–11pm.

**Matt's El Rancho** TEX-MEX This old South Austin standby is avoided by the young, hip crowd, in favor of some of the seedier, "more authentic" Tex-Mex dives. To them the place lacks character. But the rest of the Austin comes here to chow down on dependable old-school Tex-Mex dishes such as enchiladas in chili gravy, flautas, or fajitas. The chiles rellenos and shrimp a la Mexicana (smothered with peppers, onions, tomato, ranchero sauce, and jack cheese) are perennial favorites. Or you can go for a bit of everything by ordering one of the combo plates.

The original restaurant was opened downtown in 1952 by Matt Martinez, a former prizefighter. In 1986 he moved to the present location in South Austin, and now his son, Matt Jr., manages it. The restaurant is large with lots of parking. It gets crowded on

weekend nights, especially if there's a university event, and you might have to wait up to an hour. As luck would have it, there's a bar area and terrace where you can sip a fresh-lime margarita until your table is ready. Unless Matt's is really packed, noise isn't an issue. There are several dining rooms, and the tables aren't bunched together. Service is great.

2613 S. Lamar Blvd. ✆ **512/462-9333.** www.mattselrancho.com. Reservations not accepted after 6pm on weekends, except for large groups. Dinners $8.50–$18. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Mon and Wed–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

**The Salt Lick** ★ Kids BARBECUE It's 12 miles from the junction of 290 West and FM 1826 to The Salt Lick, but you'll start smelling the smoke during the last 5 miles of your trip. Moist chicken, beef, and pork, as well as terrific homemade pickles—not to mention the pretty, verdant setting—more than justify the drive. If you indulge in the all-you-can-eat family-style platter of beef, sausage, and pork ribs, you might have to pass on the fresh-baked peach cobbler, which would be a pity. In warm weather, seating is outside at picnic tables under oak trees; in winter, fireplaces blaze in a series of large, rustic rooms. The Salt Lick prides itself on its sauce, which has a sweet-and-sour tang. If you like your barbecue with a brew, you'll need to tote your own in a cooler, because Hays County is dry. Kids 3 and under eat free. But you don't have to drive all the way out to the country for a smoked-meat fix: The Salt Lick's airport branch is convenient and quick.

18300 FM 1826, Driftwood. ✆ **512/858-4959** or 888/SALT-LICK (725-8542) mail order. www.saltlickbbq.com. Reservations for large parties only. Sandwiches $7–$8; plates $10–$15. No credit cards. Daily 11am–10pm.

## Inexpensive

**Chuy's** Kids TEX-MEX One in the row of low-priced, friendly restaurants that line Barton Springs Road just east of Zilker Park, Chuy's stands out for its determinedly wacky decor—hubcaps lining the ceiling, Elvis memorabilia galore—and its sauce-smothered Tex-Mex food. You're not likely to leave hungry after specials such as Chuy's special enchiladas, piled high with smoked chicken and cheese and topped with sour cream, or one of the "big as yo' face" burritos, stuffed with ground sirloin, say, and cheese and beans.

This has been a local landmark since long before presidential daughter Jenna Bush got busted here for underage drinking. It's difficult to blame her. Chuy's is popular and doesn't take reservations; most people wait for a table by grabbing a seat in the bar area and ordering appetizers and "Mexican martinis" (like margaritas, but bigger, and with olives). Try to stay away from the free nacho bar or you'll ruin your appetite. Other locations have sprouted up: in the north on 10520 N. Lamar Blvd. (✆ **512/836-3218**), in the northwest at 11680 N. Research Blvd. (✆ **512/342-0011**), and far south at 4301 William Cannon (✆ **512/899-2489**).

1728 Barton Springs Rd. ✆ **512/474-4452.** www.chuys.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $8–$12. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

**Shady Grove** ★ AMERICAN Also on Barton Springs Road is this ironic salute to Americana. The restaurant captures a bit of the feel of David Lynch's vision of small-town "Twin Peaks," including the corny touches. Stonework and yellow pine planks make up a good bit of the dining room's interior. Deep booths lining the walls and windows covered by old-fashioned Venetian blinds complete the picture. And the menu adds to the ambience with such classics as Freddie's Airstream chili, meatloaf, and fried catfish. Shady Grove is known for its burgers made with ground sirloin. A popular choice is the green

chile cheeseburger. Also, the hippie sandwich (grilled eggplant, veggies, and cheese with pesto mayonnaise) is a good bet.

When the weather is agreeable, most patrons sit out in the very large patio shaded by trees. On Thursdays during spring and summer, this is the site of a free concert series called Shady Grove Unplugged. It features popular local artists and runs from 7 to 10pm.

1624 Barton Springs Rd. ✆ **512/474-9991.** www.theshadygrove.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $8–$11. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

**Zen** (Value) (Kids) JAPANESE The food is flavorful, healthy, and inexpensive, and the pared-down room is light and welcoming—if you're looking for a nice, quick bite, it's hard to beat Zen. The poultry in such dishes as chicken teriyaki and veggies, for example, is organic, 25¢ gets you brown instead of white rice with your order, and the menu has so many heart-healthy symbols on it that it resembles a Valentine's card. Most of the food is typically Japanese—sushi, udon noodles, rice bowls, and teriyaki dishes—except, for some reason, for the Madison Mac & Cheese. No doubt it's a tongue-in-cheek touch, like the light fixtures that look like Chia pet doormats. You order at the counter and the food is brought to your table generally very quickly.

Two newer locations are at 2900 W. Anderson Lane, Ste. 250 (✆ **512/451-4811**), and 3423 N. Guadalupe (✆ **512/300-2633**).

1303 S. Congress Ave. ✆ **512/444-8081.** www.eatzen.com. Reservations not accepted. $4.25–$8. DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.



## WEST AUSTIN

### Very Expensive

**Jeffrey's** ★★ NEW AMERICAN This little bistro in the old Clarksville neighborhood west of downtown has been a destination for food lovers for over 25 years. Some locals feel that its arrival marked the first steps of the city's march toward a food and dining culture. In keeping with the tone set by the surrounding neighborhood, the bistro is cozy, comfortable, and informal. The furniture and lighting are handled nicely, and you relax from the moment you ease into a dining chair.

Making your way through the menu, you'll find several appetizers. Most of these rotate with seasons, but one in particular, a signature dish of Jeffrey's, will always be there: the crispy oysters on yucca chips topped with habanero honey aioli. Indeed, it alone brings many people to dine here. You might also find the duck spring rolls with a jicama-mango slaw. Main courses tend to have so many flavors inserted into a dish that the diner is sometimes left wondering whether the composition will hold together at all. Examples of these combinations are found in such dishes as beef tenderloin with vanilla potatoes and smoked chile crab sauce, or duck and shrimp with black lentils and an orange-ginger glaze. In my experience, Jeffrey's pulls it off, but I'm still left wondering about the dishes I didn't order. If you want comfort food, try some other establishment.

1204 W. Lynn. ✆ **512/477-5584.** www.jeffreysofaustin.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Main courses $19–$44; tasting menu $76, with wines $112. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 6–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm; Sun 6–9:30pm.

### Moderate

**Cipollina** ★★ (Finds) ITALIAN This former deli and sandwich shop has recently shifted gears and become an excellent neighborhood bistro. The new chefs are detail-oriented control freaks who do their own butchering and curing and insist on buying from local organic farmers and ranchers. The pizzas and sandwiches that Cipollina was

known for are still on the menu and even better. Try the bacon and Gorgonzola pizza. On the third Wednesday of every month, patrons enjoy a food and wine pairing menu (six courses and three wines) for $30, and there are plans to begin serving a "farm dinner" on the first Wednesday, which would feature the produce of a particular local farm. Simple elegance is the hallmark of the dining room, with comfortable furniture and lots of space. Prices are good for the kind of cooking you get here, but I suspect they might climb a bit now that this bistro is attracting a loyal following. The menu changes seasonally. To finish off your meal, walk a block south to Caffe Medici (1101 W. Lynn; ✆ **512/524-5049**) for some of the best espresso in Austin.

1213 W. Lynn. ✆ **512/477-5211.** www.cipollina-austin.com. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas $7–$15; sandwiches $6–$8; main courses $10–$19. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

### Inexpensive

**Zocalo** (Value) MEXICAN This fast-food Mexican cafe in the Clarksville neighborhood offers light, healthy fare for reasonable prices. You place your order at the counter, and the staff will bring it to your table. The food is fresh, and the tortillas are made in-house. The soft tacos, which come three to an order accompanied by rice and beans, make for just the right amount to satisfy an appetite without overeating. The fillings vary among vegetables, fish, fowl, and beef. Unlike Tex-Mex tacos, they don't come topped with cheese. Specialties include the Zocalo plate, which is another name for what Mexicans call *chilaquiles con pollo*—tortilla bits, cooked with chicken in a green sauce and topped with crumbled fresh cheese and sour cream. The popular tostada salad comes with black beans, avocado, cilantro, roasted jalapeños, and a lime dressing. There's also a good choice of soups. The dining area is flooded by natural light from tall windows, and an outdoor area is available when the weather is agreeable.

1110 W. Lynn St. ✆ **512/472-8226.** www.zocalocafe.com. Reservations not accepted. Plates $6–$9. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–10pm; Sat–Sun 10am–10pm.

## CENTRAL

### Expensive

**Fonda San Miguel** ★ MEXICAN This was one of the first restaurants to introduce fine dining a la Mexicana to Texas. For this reason it's a landmark restaurant, but as of late, it has been in a holding pattern, keeping the quality up, but not showing much imagination. You can get classic dishes such as *mole poblano* and *cochinita pibil* that are nicely prepared, but the dinner menu doesn't have much that's new. Fonda enjoys a faithful clientele that is locked in. There's something about the graceful rooms, the rich colors, and the attractive lighting that makes for a charming evening. For the pleasure of this experience, though, you pay quite a bit more than at other Mexican restaurants, but for a special evening it's worth it. Sunday brunch is a big deal at Fonda, with a more interesting selection of dishes (such as fruit gazpacho and chilaquiles).

2330 W. North Loop. ✆ **512/459-4121** or 459-3401. www.fondasanmiguel.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $18–$31; Sunday brunch $50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5:30–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm (bar opens 30 min. earlier); Sun brunch 11am–2pm.

### Moderate

**Hyde Park Bar and Grill** (Value) AMERICAN In the Hyde Park neighborhood's little enclave of restaurants along Duval Street is the Hyde Park Bar & Grill, easy to spot due to the landmark giant fork out front. Not only is it easy to find, but also it's easy to get to, it's easy to park your car, and, at least during off-hours, it's easy to get a table here.

## Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants

**Curra's Grill** (p. 320), **Güero's** (p. 320), **Hoover's** (p. 325), **Threadgill's** (see below), and **Zen** (p. 322) all have special menus for ages 12 and under, not to mention casual, kid-friendly atmospheres and food inexpensive enough to feed everyone without taking out a second mortgage. **Chuy's** (p. 321) is great for teens and aspiring teens, who'll love the cool T-shirts, Elvis kitsch, and green iguanas crawling up the walls. **The Salt Lick** (p. 321) serves all-you-can-eat family-style platters, and kids 3 and under eat free.

If you do have to wait, then it's easy to have a drink at the bar. On weekends this place is popular, especially when there are events at the university. In addition to the chicken-fried steak and more healthful options, such as the roast chicken or any one of the various salads, people come here for the battered french fries, which are perennially voted best fries in Austin. The atmosphere at Hyde Park—a one-story former home now divided into different dining rooms—is cozy, and the service is quick and unobtrusive.

4206 Duval St. ✆ **512/458-3168.** Reservations not accepted. Salads and sandwiches $6–$9; main courses $9–$16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight.



### Inexpensive

**Mother's Cafe & Garden** Value VEGETARIAN/VEGAN This neighborhood vegetarian restaurant is attractive, spacious, and softly lit. The dining rooms are understated modern with touches of homeyness. They conjure up Austin's laid-back mood in much the same way as the old place did before it was gutted by fire in 2007. Vegetarians are among the mellowest of Austin's latent hippie culture, making this place welcome relief from some of the more frenetic eateries in town. If there's a signature dish, it might be the artichoke enchiladas with mushrooms and black olives. Many prefer the zingier barbecued tofu. Aside from these and other regionally inspired dishes, there are vegetarian standards such as spinach lasagna, a vegetable stir-fry, and a popular veggie burger. If you order a salad, check out the cashew-tamari dressing, which is very popular. Desserts are quite good, and you might consider ordering two—after such a healthful entree, you can afford a small indulgence.

4215 Duval St. ✆ **512/451-3994.** www.motherscafeaustin.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $8–$10. DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:15am–10pm; Sat–Sun 10am–10pm.

**Threadgill's** ★ Kids AMERICAN/SOUTHERN If you want a hit of music history along with heaping plates of down-home food at good prices, this Austin institution is for you. When Kenneth Threadgill obtained Travis County's first legal liquor license after the repeal of prohibition in 1933, he turned his Gulf gas station into a club. His Wednesday-night shows were legendary in the 1960s, with performers such as Janis Joplin turning up regularly. In turn, the Southern-style diner that was added on in 1980 became renowned for its huge chicken-fried steaks, as well as its vegetables. You can get fried okra, broccoli-rice casserole, garlic-cheese grits, black-eyed peas, and the like in combination plates or as sides.

Eddie Wilson, the current owner of Threadgill's, was the founder of the now-defunct Armadillo World Headquarters, Austin's most famous music venue (the South Austin

branch at 301 W. Riverside [✆ **512/472-9304**] is called Threadgill's World Headquarters). Across the street from the old Armadillo, it's filled with music memorabilia from the club and a state-of-the-art sound system. Unlike the original location, it lays on a Sunday brunch buffet and, during the week, a "howdy" hour. Both branches still double as live music venues.

6416 N. Lamar Blvd. ✆ **512/451-5440.** www.threadgills.com. Reservations not accepted. Sandwiches and burgers $8–$9; main courses $9–$17. DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm; Sun 11am–9pm.

## EAST SIDE

### Moderate

**Eastside Cafe** AMERICAN This was one of the earliest eateries to open in this rapidly changing area just east of the university, on the other side of the I-35 freeway. Eastside Cafe remains popular with student herbivores and congressional carnivores alike. Diners enjoy eating on a tree-shaded patio or in one of a series of small, homey rooms in a classic turn-of-the-20th-century bungalow.

This restaurant gears its menu to all appetites. You can get half orders of such pasta dishes as the pesto ravioli, of the mixed field green salad topped with warm goat cheese, and of entrees like the sesame-breaded catfish. Many of the main courses have a Southern-comfort orientation—pork tenderloin with corn-bread stuffing, say—and all come with soup or salad and a vegetable. Each morning, the gardener informs the head chef which of the vegetables in the restaurant's large organic garden are ready for active duty. An adjoining store carries gardening tools, cookware, and the cafe's salad dressings.

2113 Manor Rd. ✆ **512/476-5858.** www.eastsidecafeaustin.com. Reservations recommended. Pastas $14–$18; main courses $10–$22. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:15am–9:30pm; Fri 11:15am–10pm; Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–9:30pm (brunch Sat–Sun 10am–3pm).

### Inexpensive

**Hoover's** (Finds) (Kids) AMERICAN/SOUTHERN This is down-home comfort food at its best. When native Austinite Alexander Hoover, long a presence on the local restaurant scene, opened up his own place near the neighborhood where he grew up, he looked to his mother's recipes and added a smidge of Cajun and Tex-Mex for inspiration. Fried catfish, meatloaf, gravy-smothered pork chops with sides of mac and cheese or jalapeño-creamed spinach come to the table in generous-size portions. For a sandwich, try the muffuletta. And if you haven't yet tried that Texas standard, the chicken-fried steak, this is a great place to do so. Check the chalkboard for daily specials and seasonal side dishes. It will also list the desserts that are available. If coconut cream pie is on the list, making a decision is much easier. The crowd is a mix of the Eastside African-American community, UT students, and food lovers from all around town.

2002 Manor Rd. ✆ **512/479-5006.** www.hooverscooking.com. Reservations not accepted. Sandwiches (with 1 side) $8–$9; plates (with 2 sides) $10–$15. DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

## WESTLAKE/LAKE TRAVIS

### Very Expensive

**Hudson's on the Bend** ★★ NEW AMERICAN If you're game for game, served in a very civilized setting, come to Hudson's. Soft candlelight, fresh flowers, fine china, and attentive service combine with outstanding and out-of-the-ordinary cuisine to make this worth a special-occasion splurge. Sparkling lights draped over a cluster of oak trees draw you into a series of romantic dining rooms, set in an old house some 1½ miles southwest of the Mansfield Dam, near Lake Travis. The chipotle cream sauce was sufficiently spicy

that it was hard to tell whether the diamondback rattlesnake cakes tasted like chicken; but they were very good, as were the duck confit *gordita* (thick corn tortilla) and wild-game tamale starters. Pecan-smoked duck breast and a mixed grill of venison, rabbit, quail, and buffalo are among the excellent entrees I've sampled. One caveat to be aware of is that the charming but acoustically poor setting can make Hudson's indoor dining rooms noisy on weekends. Opt for the terrace if the weather permits.

3509 Hwy. 620 N. ✆ **512/266-1369.** www.hudsonsonthebend.com. Reservations recommended, essential on weekends. Main courses $26–$45. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun 6–9pm; Mon–Thurs 6–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10pm.

## Moderate

**County Line on the Hill** ★ (Kids) BARBECUE This scenic hillside barbecue restaurant is the original of the County Line chain, opened in 1975. The original business on this site, dating from the 1920s, was a speak-easy, positioned strategically on the "county line" between a dry county and a wet one. But these days people come for the barbecue. Some critics deride these restaurants as "suburban" barbecue, but that doesn't stop crowds from packing in here nightly. This restaurant is now a little less packed since it started opening for lunch, but if you don't get here before 6pm for dinner, you can wait as long as an hour to eat. Should this happen, sit out on the deck and soak in the views of the Hill Country. County Line is known for its big beef ribs, but I like the pork ribs better. The brisket is lean unless you specify "moist," which I also recommend. Sausage and chicken are also good bets. The slow-cooking method employed here makes for consistently good barbecue. The sides, beans, slaw, and potato salad aren't just after thoughts, and the bread is baked in-house. The atmosphere is rustic country house with nostalgic accents such as old signs and photos. County Line on the Lake (northwest), 5204 FM 2222 (✆ **512/346-3664**), offers the same menu, and is also open for lunch and dinner.

6500 W. Bee Cave Rd. ✆ **512/327-1742.** Reservations not accepted. Plates $11–$20; all-you-can-eat platters $19–$27 ($6–$8 for children 11 and under). AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm; Fri 11:30am–2pm and 5–10pm; Sat 11:30am–10pm; Sun 11:30am–9:30pm (closing times are a half-hour earlier in winter).

**The Oasis** AMERICAN/TEX-MEX This is the required spot for Austinites to take out-of-town guests at sunset. From the multilevel decks nestled into the hillside hundreds of feet above Lake Travis, visitors and locals alike cheer—with toasts and applause—as the fiery orb descends behind the hills on the opposite shores. No one ever leaves unimpressed. The food is another matter entirely: It can be erratic. Keep it simple—nachos, burgers—and you'll be okay. Then add a margarita, and kick back. It doesn't get much mellower than this.

6550 Comanche Trail, near Lake Travis. ✆ **512/266-2442.** www.oasis-austin.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $12–$20. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri 11:30am–11pm; Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 11am–10pm (brunch 11am–2pm); closing an hour earlier in fall/winter.



# 5 SEEING THE SIGHTS

I have two pieces of advice for visitors to Austin. First, don't hesitate to ask locals for directions or advice. Austinites are friendly and approachable. It's common practice here for complete strangers to engage in conversation. Indeed, one of the great things about Austin is how welcoming the city is. And second, take full advantage of the city's Visitor Information Center at 209 E. Sixth St. It offers free walking tours, has pamphlets for

self-guided tours, and is the point of departure for the motorized city tours. The office will know if one of the daily tours is canceled for whatever reason.

What sets Austin apart from other Texas cities, and what puts it on all those "most livable" lists is the amount of green space and outdoor activities available to its denizens, whose attitude toward the outdoors borders on nature worship. From bats and birds to Barton Springs, from the Highland Lakes to the hike-and-bike trails, Austin lays out the green carpet for its visitors. You'd be hard-pressed to find a city that has more to offer fresh-air enthusiasts.

## THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

### Downtown & Central Austin

**Blanton Museum of Art ★** Located on the University of Texas campus (across the street from the Bob Bullock Museum), this museum was built a couple of years ago to hold the university's art collection, which is ranked among the top university art collections in the United States. Most notable is the Suida-Manning Collection, a gathering of Renaissance works by such masters as Veronese, Rubens, and Tiepolo that was sought after by the Metropolitan museum, among others. Other permanent holdings include the Mari and James Michener collection of 20th-century American masters, a large collection of Latin American art, and a collection of 19th-century plaster casts of monumental Greek and Roman sculpture.

The museum has been a big success in its first few years, attracting large crowds. The directors are working hard to increase public involvement through a variety of events. On the first Friday of every month, it hosts a little happening called "B scene," which mixes art with live music, wine, finger foods, and socializing. It costs $10, runs from 6 to 11pm, and is fun. Check the website for their other events that mix things such as yoga with the arts. The Blanton opened a second building in early fall of 2008, which holds a cafe for visitors, in addition to administration offices and lecture halls.

Martin Luther King at Congress. ✆ **512/471-7324.** www.blantonmuseum.org. $5 adults, $4 seniors (65 and over), $3 youth (13–25), free for children 12 and under. Free admission on Thurs. Parking $3 with validation. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm (until 8pm Thurs); Sun 1–4pm. Bus: UT Shuttle.

**The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum ★** Value Kids You'll get a quick course in Texas 101 at this museum, opened near the state capitol in 2001 and designed to echo some of its elements. Three floors of exhibits are arrayed around a rotunda set off by a 50-foot, polished granite map of Texas. It's an impressive building, and the permanent displays—everything from Stephen F. Austin's diary to Neil Armstrong's spacesuit—and rotating exhibits are interesting enough but, for all the interactive video clips and engaging designs (lots of different rooms to duck into; varied floor surfaces), the presentations didn't strike me as dramatically different from those in other history museums. The real treat is the multimedia, special-effects Spirit Theater, the only one of its kind in Texas, where you can experience the high-speed whoosh of the great Galveston hurricane and feel your seats rattle as an East Texas oil well hits a gusher. Austin's only IMAX Theater with 3-D capabilities is pretty dazzling too, though the films don't necessarily have a direct relation to Texas history. If you do everything, plan to spend at least 2 1/2 to 3 hours here.

1800 N. Congress Ave. ✆ **512/936-8746.** www.thestoryoftexas.com. Exhibit areas: $7 adults, $6 seniors 65 and over, $4 youths 5–18, free for children 4 and under. IMAX Theater: $7 adults, $6 seniors, $5 youth. Texas Spirit Theater: $5 adults, $4 seniors, $4 youth. Combination tickets for admission to exhibits and one or both theaters are available. Parking $8 (IMAX parking free after 6pm). Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; Sun noon–6pm. Phone or check website for additional IMAX evening hours. Closed Jan 1, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Dec 24–25. Bus: UT Shuttle.

## Kids Going Batty

Austin has the largest urban bat population in North America. Some visitors are dubious at first, but it's difficult to be unimpressed by the sight of 1.5 million of the creatures, who emerge from under the Congress Avenue Bridge shortly before dusk and flitter through the air in a long winding ribbon floating above the river on the east side of the bridge.

Each March, free-tailed bats migrate from central Mexico to various roost sites in the Southwest. In 1980, when a deck reconstruction of Austin's bridge created an ideal environment for raising bat pups, some 750,000 pregnant females began settling in every year. Each bat gives birth to a single pup, and by August these offspring take part in nightly forays for bugs, usually around dusk. Depending on the size of the group, they might consume anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 pounds of insects a night—one of the things that make them so popular with Austinites. By November, these youngsters are old enough to hitch rides back south with their group on the winds of an early cold front.

While the bats are in town, an educational kiosk designed to dispel some of the more prevalent myths about them is set up each evening on the south bank of the river, just east of the bridge. You'll learn, for example, that bats are not rodents, they're not blind, and they're not in the least interested in getting in your hair. **Bat Conservation International** (✆ **512/327-9721;** www.batcon.org), based in Austin, has lots of information—not to mention bat-related items for sale. Log on to the website or phone ✆ **800/538-BATS** (538-2287) for a catalog. To find out what time the bats are going to emerge from the bridge, call the *Austin American-Statesman* **Bat Hot Line** (✆ **512/416-5700,** category 3636). ***Tip:*** Sometimes the bats don't leave all at once. If you can still hear bats chattering from beneath the bridge, sit tight; you may have an encore presentation.



**LBJ Library and Museum** ★ Value A presidential library may sound like a big yawn, but this one's almost as interesting as the 36th president to whom it's devoted. The story of Johnson's long political career, starting with his early days as a state representative and continuing through the Kennedy assassination and the groundbreaking Great Society legislation, is told through a variety of documents, mementos, and photographs. Johnson loved political cartoons, even when he was the object of their satire, and examples from his large collection are among the museum's most interesting rotating exhibits. Other exhibits might include anything from photographs from the American civil rights era to a display of presidential holiday cards, to an animatronic version of LBJ. This building commands an impressive campus view. A large, free parking lot next to the library makes it one of the few UT campus sights that's easy to drive up to.

University of Texas, 2313 Red River. ✆ **512/721-0200.** www.lbjlib.utexas.edu. Free admission. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 15; UT Shuttle.

**State Capitol** ★★ Value The largest state capitol in the country, second only in size to the U.S. Capitol—but measuring 7 feet taller—this 1888 building covers 3 acres of ground. A $188-million revamp restored the capitol building and grounds to their

former glory and added a striking new underground annex, which connects the capitol and four other state buildings by tunnels. The legislative sessions are open to the public; go up to the third-floor visitors' gallery if you want see how politics are conducted Texas-style. Include the Capitol Visitors Center (p. 330), and figure on spending 2 hours, minimum, here. ***Tip:*** Wear comfortable shoes; you'll be doing a lot of walking.

11th and Congress sts. ✆ **512/463-0063.** www.tspb.state.tx.us. Free admission. Mon–Fri 7am–10pm; Sat–Sun 9am–8pm; hours extended during legislative sessions (held in odd years, starting in Jan, for 140 straight calendar days). Closed all major holidays. Free guided tours Mon–Fri 8:30am–4:30pm; Sat 9:30am–3:30pm; Sun noon–3:30pm. Bus: multiple bus lines; Congress Dillo.

## South Austin

**Barton Springs Pool** ★★ Kids The Native Americans who settled near here believed these waters had spiritual powers, and today's residents still place their faith in the abilities of the spring-fed pool to soothe and cool. Each day, approximately 32 million gallons of water from the underground Edwards Aquifer bubble to the surface here, and at one time, this force powered several Austin mills. Although the original limestone bottom remains, concrete was added to the banks to form uniform sides to what is now a swimming pool of about 1,000×125 feet. Maintaining a constant 68°F (20°C) temperature, the amazingly clear water is bracing in summer and warming in winter, when many hearty souls brave the cold for a dip. Lifeguards are on duty for most of the day, and a large bathhouse operated by the Parks and Recreation Department offers changing facilities and a gift shop.

Zilker Park, 2201 Barton Springs Rd. ✆ **512/476-9044.** www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/bartonsprings.htm. Admission $3 adults, $2 youths 12–17, $1 seniors and children 11 and under (admission charged only after 9am Mar 13–Oct; free for early birds). Daily 5am–10pm except during pool maintenance (Thurs 9am–7pm). Splash! Tues–Fri noon–6pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Bus: 30 (Barton Creek Sq.).

**Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center** ★★★ Mrs. Johnson founded the Wildflower Center to research native species and habitat and educate the public on the benefits of gardening with these plants and wildflowers. The center has a large staff and scores of volunteers, 279 acres of land, large greenhouses, and an elaborate rainwater collection system. The facility's research library is the largest in the United States for the study of native plants. For visitors, the main attractions are the 12 acres of beautiful gardens displaying 650 species of native plants (most of which are labeled) in varying habitats, 2 miles of trails, and an observation tower. There is also a large and colorful gift shop and a cafe serving soups and sandwiches. Free lectures and guided walks are usually offered on the weekends—it's best to phone or check the website for current programs.

4801 La Crosse Ave. ✆ **512/292-4200.** www.wildflower.org. Admission $7 adults, $6 students and seniors 60 and older, $3 children 5–12, free for children 4 and under. Tues–Sat 9am–5:30pm; Sun noon–5pm. (Mar–Apr rates go up to $7/$5 and grounds are open Mon.) Take Loop 1 (Mo-Pac) south to La Crosse Ave. and turn left.

# MORE ATTRACTIONS

## Downtown

**Austin Museum of Art–Downtown** This has become the main gallery space for Austin's local art association. It represents a sizable expansion from the association's other location in the mansion of Laguna Gloria, in West Austin. The downtown gallery hosts some interesting, often highly original, exhibits. It's not formal at all and can be visited as an after thought if you're downtown with some time on your hands. And you can always check what's currently on display by going to their Web page.

823 Congress Ave. (at 9th St.). ✆ **512/495-9224.** www.amoa.org. Admission $5 adults, $4 seniors 55 and over and students, free for children 11 and under, $1 for everyone on Tues. Tues–Wed and Fri–Sat 10am–6pm; Thurs 10am–8pm; Sun noon–5pm. Bus: Congress 'Dillo.

**Bremond Block ★** In the mid-1860s, Eugene Bremond, an early Austin banker, started investing in land on what was once Block 80 of the original city plan. In 1874, he moved into a Greek revival home made by master builder Abner Cook. By the time he was through, he had created a family compound, purchasing and enlarging homes for himself, two sisters, a daughter, a son, and a brother-in-law. Some were destroyed, but those that remain on what is now known as the Bremond Block are exquisite examples of elaborate late-19th-century homes.

Btw. 7th and 8th, San Antonio and Guadalupe sts. Bus: Sixth St. 'Dillo.

**Capitol Visitors Center ★** The capitol wasn't the only important member of the state complex to undergo a face-lift: Texas also spent $4 million to gussy up its oldest surviving office building, the 1857 General Land Office. If the imposing German Romanesque structure looks a bit grand for the headquarters of an administrative agency, keep in mind that land has long been the state's most important resource. Among the employees of this important—and very political—office was the writer O. Henry, who worked as a draftsman from 1887 to 1891. He based two short stories on his experiences here.

112 E. 11th St. (southeast corner of capitol grounds). ✆ **512/305-8400.** www.texascapitolvisitorscenter.com. Free admission. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Bus: Congress 'Dillo.



**The Driskill** Col. Jesse Driskill was not a modest man. When he opened a hotel in 1886, he named it after himself, put busts of himself and his two sons over the entrances, and installed bas-relief sculptures of longhorn steers to remind folks how he had made his fortune. Nor did he build a modest property. The ornate four-story structure, which originally boasted a sky-lit rotunda, has the largest arched doorway in Texas over its east entrance. It was so posh that the state legislature met here while the 1888 capitol was being built. The hotel has had its ups and downs over the years, but it was restored to its former glory in the late 1990s. You can pick up a history of the hotel at the front desk, and if the concierge has time, he'll be happy to help orient you. For a full hotel review, see p. 307.

604 Brazos St. ✆ **512/474-5911.** Bus: Congress or Sixth St. 'Dillo.

**Governor's Mansion ★** This venerable public building suffered serious damage when it was targeted by arsonists on the night of June 8, 2008, when the mansion was closed for renovation work. Workers managed to stabilize the structure and protect it from the elements, but extensive restoration is necessary and no one can say how long the work will take.

In ordinary times this mansion is the governor's residence. State law requires that the governor live here whenever he or she is in Austin. The house was originally built by Abner Cook in 1856. Originally it had no indoor toilets (there are now seven). The nation's first female governor, Miriam "Ma" Ferguson, entertained her friend Will Rogers in the mansion, and Gov. John Connally recuperated here from gunshot wounds received when he accompanied John F. Kennedy on his fatal motorcade through Dallas. Among the many historical artifacts on display are a desk belonging to Stephen F. Austin and portraits of Davy Crockett and Sam Houston.

1010 Colorado St. ✆ **512/463-5516** (recorded information) or 463-5518 (tour reservations). www.txfgm.org. Free admission. Tours generally offered every 20 min. Mon–Thurs 10am–noon (last tour starts 11:40am). Closed Fri, weekends, some holidays, and at the discretion of the governor; call the 24-hr. information line to see if tours are offered the day you want to visit. Bus: Congress 'Dillo.

**Mexic-Arte Museum** The first organization in Austin to promote multicultural contemporary art when it was formed in 1983, Mexic-Arte has a small permanent collection of 20th-century Mexican art, including photographs from the Mexican revolution and a fascinating array of masks from the state of Guerrero. It's supplemented by visiting shows—including some from Mexico, such as a recent survey of south-of-the-border contemporary art—and a back gallery of works of local Latino artists.

419 Congress Ave. ✆ **512/480-9373.** www.mexic-artemuseum.org. Admission $5 adults, $4 seniors and students, $1 children 11 and under. Mon–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Bus: Congress 'Dillo.

## Central

**Elisabet Ney Museum ★** Elisabet Ney was a celebrated German sculptor who was accustomed to carving the likenesses of philosophers, statesmen, and kings (Schopenhauer, Garibaldi, Bismarck, Ludwig II, among others). She was also a woman of ideas and was part of a circle of intellectuals in Munich. She and her scientist husband were on the outs with the Prussians and had to flee Germany just before the war of 1870, first to Georgia, then to Texas. Strong-willed and independent, she moved to Austin by herself in 1891 because she was bored of life on the family farm near Hempstead, Texas. She constructed the studio that is now part of the museum and got busy creating sculptures of Texas leaders, including Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston. She also had an immediate impact on Austin society, entertaining all the local intelligentsia, politicians, and visiting celebrities, such as William Jennings Bryan and Enrico Caruso. After her death in 1907, her friends claimed the studio-residence for a museum dedicated to this fascinating woman. It's a great way to spend an hour, if you have the chance.

304 E. 44th St. ✆ **512/458-2255.** www.elisabetney.org. Free admission. Wed–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Bus: 1 or 5.

**Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center ★** The special collections of the Harry Ransom Center (HRC) contain approximately one million rare books (including a Gutenberg Bible, one of only five complete copies in the U.S.); 30 million literary manuscripts (including those by James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Tennessee Williams); five million photographs, including the world's first; and more than 100,000 works of art, with several pieces by Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. The gallery was opened in 2003, but visitors are welcome to view only select portions of the collection. Recent exhibits have examined the Beat generation, the American '20s, and the technology of the written word.

University of Texas, Harry Ransom Center, 21st and Guadalupe sts. ✆ **512/471-8944.** www.hrc.utexas.edu. Free admission. Galleries Tues–Wed and Fri 10am–5pm; Thurs 10am–7pm; Sat–Sun noon–5pm; call for reading-room hours. Closed university holidays. Bus: UT Shuttle.

**Texas Memorial Museum** Kids This museum, opened in 1936 to guard the natural and cultural treasures of the state, is now devoted to the natural sciences alone. Despite a major revamp in the early 2000s, it still seems oddly old-fashioned in parts, especially the lifeless dioramas and weird stuff in jars on the fourth floor. But kids will like the first-floor Hall of Geology, with its huge Texas Pterosaur—the largest flying creature ever

 found—suspended from the ceiling. The admission price is right, and the gift shop carries lots of good science toys.

University of Texas, 2400 Trinity St. ✆ **512/471-1604.** www.texasmemorialmuseum.org. Free admission (donations appreciated). Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm. Closed major holidays. Bus: UT shuttle.

## East Side

**French Legation Museum** The oldest residence still standing in Austin was built in 1841 for Count Alphonse Dubois de Saligny, France's representative to the fledgling Republic of Texas. Although his home was extravagant for the then-primitive capital, the flamboyant de Saligny didn't stay around to enjoy it for very long: He left town in a huff after his servant was beaten in retaliation for making bacon out of some pigs that had dined on the diplomat's linens. The house sits on a hill above downtown Austin and is considered one of the best examples of French colonial architecture outside Louisiana. Behind the house, in a separate structure, is a reconstruction of the original Creole kitchen.

802 San Marcos. ✆ **512/472-8180.** www.frenchlegationmuseum.org. Admission $4 adults, $3 seniors, $2 students/teachers, free for children 5 and under. Tours Tues–Sun 1–4:30pm. Bus: 4 and 18 stop nearby (at San Marcos and 7th sts.). Go east on 7th St., then turn left on San Marcos St.; the parking lot is behind the museum on Embassy and 9th sts.

## GREEN SPACES

**Zilker Botanical Garden ★ Kids** There's bound to be something blooming at the Zilker Botanical Garden from March to October, but no matter what time of year, you'll find this a soothing outdoor oasis to spend some time in. The Oriental Garden, created by the landscape architect Isamu Taniguchi when he was 70 years old, is particularly peaceful. Be sure to ask someone at the garden center to point out how Taniguchi landscaped the word "Austin" into a series of ponds in the design. A butterfly garden attracts gorgeous winged visitors during April and October migrations, and you can poke and prod the many plants in the herb garden to get them to yield their fragrances. Dinosaur tracks, discovered on the grounds in the early 1990s, are part of the 1 1/2-acre Hartman Prehistoric Garden, which includes plants from the Cretaceous Period and a 13-foot bronze sculpture of an Ornithomimus dinosaur.

2220 Barton Springs Rd. ✆ **512/477-8672.** www.zilkergarden.org. Free admission. Grounds dawn–dusk. Garden center Mon–Fri 8:30am–4pm; Sat 10am–5pm (Jan–Feb 1–5pm); Sun 1–5pm (sometimes open earlier on weekends for special garden shows; phone ahead). Bus: 30.

**Zilker Park ★ Kids** Comprising 347 acres, the first 40 of which were donated to the city by the wealthy German immigrant for whom the park is named, this is Austin's favorite public playground. Its centerpiece is Barton Springs Pool (see "The Top Attractions," earlier in this chapter), but visitors and locals also flock to the Zilker Botanical Garden, the Austin Nature Preserves, and the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum. See also the "Especially for Kids" and "Staying Active" sections for details about the Austin Nature and Science Center, the Zilker Zephyr Miniature Train, and Town Lake canoe rentals. In addition to its athletic fields (nine for soccer, one for rugby, and two multiuse), the park hosts a 9-hole disk (Frisbee) golf course and a sand volleyball court.

2201 Barton Springs Rd. ✆ **512/476-9044.** www.ci.austin.tx.us/zilker. Free admission. Daily 5am–10pm. Bus: 30.

## ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

The **Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum** (p. 327) and the **Texas Memorial Museum** (p. 331), are child-friendly, but outdoor attractions are still Austin's biggest draw for children. There's lots of room for children to splash around at **Barton Springs,** and even youngsters who thought bats were creepy are likely to be converted on further acquaintance with the critters.

In addition, kids enjoy the **Austin Children's Museum** ★★, Dell Discovery Center, 201 Colorado St. (✆ **512/472-2499;** www.austinkids.org), a rambling state-of-the-art facility that's got everything from low-key but creative playscapes for tots to studio soundstage replicas for teens. Bats, bees, and crystal caverns are among the subjects of the Discovery Boxes at the 80-acre **Austin Nature and Science Center** ★, Zilker Park, 301 Nature Center Dr. (✆ **512/327-8181**), which also abounds with interactive exhibits involving rescued animals. The Dino Pit is a lure for budding paleontologists. The scenic 25-minute ride on the narrow-gauge **Zilker Zephyr Miniature Train,** 2100 Barton Springs Rd., just across from the Barton Springs Pool (✆ **512/478-8286**), goes at a leisurely pace through Zilker Park along Barton Creek and Town Lake.

## ORGANIZED TOURS

The aquatically inclined might consider taking one of the electric-powered **Capital Cruises** (✆ **512/480-9264;** www.capitalcruises.com), which ply Town Lake March through October. Options include bat-viewing cruises, fajita dinner cruises, and afternoon sightseeing excursions. Similar itineraries are offered by **Lone Star River Boat** (✆ **512/327-1388**), but they go farther upstream and add narration. Both companies depart from the dock near the Hyatt Regency Hotel. Can't decide between sea and land? Board one of the six-wheel-drive amphibious vehicles operated by **Austin Duck Adventures** (✆ **512/4-SPLASH** [477-5274]; www.austinducks.com). After exploring Austin's downtown and scenic west side, you'll splash into Lake Austin. Tours board in front of the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau, 209 E. 6th St.

## WALKING TOURS

You won't find better guided walks than the informative and entertaining **tours** ★★ offered free of charge by the **Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau** (**ACVB;** ✆ **866/GO-AUSTIN** [462-8784] or 512/454-1545; www.austintexas.org) from March to November. Ninety-minute tours of the historic Bremond Block leave every Saturday and Sunday at 11am; Congress Avenue/East 6th Street is explored for 1½ hours on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday starting at 9am, Sunday at 2pm. The hour-long capitol grounds tour is conducted on Saturday at 2pm and Sunday at 9am. All tours depart promptly from the south entrance of the capitol, weather permitting. Be warned, though: Come even a few minutes late and you'll miss out.

# 6 STAYING ACTIVE

## OUTDOOR FUN

**BIKING** Austin publishes a map of city bike routes for the benefit of local bike commuters and those visitors who want to pedal around town. You can download a PDF version of the map or order a hard copy by going to this website: www.ci.austin.tx.us/bicycle/bikemap.htm. If you want to ride on trails, you have your choice of the mellow

Hike and Bike Trail around Lady Bird Lake (10 miles), or the more challenging Barton Creek Greenbelt (7.8 miles). Contact **Austin Parks and Recreation,** 200 S. Lamar Blvd. (✆ **512/974-6700;** www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks), for more information on these and other bike trails. There is also a paved **Veloway,** a 3.1-mile paved loop in Slaughter Creek Metropolitan Park, in far south Austin. It is devoted exclusively to bicyclists and in-line skaters.

You can rent bikes and get maps and other information from **University Cyclery,** 2901 N. Lamar Blvd. (✆ **512/474-6696;** www.universitycyclery.com). A number of downtown hotels rent or provide free bicycles to their guests. For information on weekly road rides, contact the **Austin Cycling Association,** P.O. Box 5993, Austin, TX 78763 (✆ **512/282-7413;** www.austincycling.org). For rougher mountain bike routes, try the **Austin Ridge Riders.** Their website, www.austinridgeriders.com, will have the latest contact information.

**CANOEING** You can rent canoes at **Zilker Park,** 2000 Barton Springs Rd. (✆ **512/478-3852;** www.fastair.com/zilker), for $10 an hour or $40 all day (daily Apr–Sept; only weekends and holidays, weather permitting, Oct–Mar). **Capital Cruises,** Hyatt Regency boat dock (✆ **512/480-9264;** www.capitalcruises.com), also offers hourly rentals on Town Lake.

**GOLF** For information about Austin's five municipal golf courses, and to set up tee times, log on to www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/golf.htm. All but the 9-hole Hancock course offer pro shops and equipment rental, and their greens fees are reasonable. The **Hancock** course was built in 1899 and is the oldest course in Texas. The **Lions** course is where Tom Kite and Ben Crenshaw played college golf for the University of Texas.

**HIKING** Austin's parks and preserves abound in nature trails. Contact the **Sierra Club** (✆ **512/472-1767;** www.texas.sierraclub.org/austin) if you're interested in organized hikes. **Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve** (✆ **512/327-7622;** www.wildbasin.org) is another source for guided treks, offering periodic "Haunted Trails" tours along with its more typical hikes.

**SWIMMING** The best known of Austin's natural swimming holes is **Barton Springs Pool** (see "The Top Attractions," earlier in this chapter), but it's by no means the only one. Other scenic outdoor spots to take the plunge include **Deep Eddy Pool,** 401 Deep Eddy Ave. at Lake Austin Boulevard (✆ **512/472-8546**).

For lakeshore swimming, consider **Hippie Hollow** on Lake Travis, 2½ miles off FM 620 (www.co.travis.tx.us/tnr/parks/hippie_hollow.asp), where you can let it all hang out in a series of clothing-optional coves, or **Emma Long Metropolitan Park** on Lake Austin (✆ **512/346-1831** or 346-3807).

You can also get into the swim at a number of **free neighborhood pools;** contact City Aquatics (✆ **512/476-4521;** www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/aquatics.htm) for more information.

## SPECTATOR SPORTS

College sports are very big, particularly when the **University of Texas (UT) Longhorns** are playing. The most comprehensive source of information on the various teams is www.texassports.com, but you can phone the **UT Athletics Ticket Office** (✆ **512/471-3333**) to find out about schedules and **UTTM Charge-A-Ticket** (✆ **512/477-6060**) to order tickets.

**BASEBALL** The **University of Texas** baseball team goes to bat February through May at Disch-Falk Field (just east of I-35, at the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and Comal). Many players from this school have gone on to the pros.

Baseball Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan's **Round Rock Express,** a Houston Astros farm club, won the Texas League championship in 1999, their first year in existence (they now compete in the Pacific Coast League). See them play at the Dell Diamond, 3400 E. Palm Valley Rd. in Round Rock (✆ **512/255-BALL** [255-2255] or 244-4209; www.roundrockexpress.com), an 8,688-seat stadium where you can choose from box seats or stadium seating—and an additional 3,000 fans can sit on a grassy berm in the outfield. Tickets range from about $6 to $12.

**BASKETBALL** The **University of Texas** Longhorn and Lady Longhorn basketball teams, both former Southwest Conference champions, play in the Frank C. Erwin Jr. Special Events Center (just west of I-35 on Red River btw. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and 15th St.) November through March.

**FOOTBALL** It's hard to tell which is more central to the success of an Austin Thanksgiving: the turkey or the UT–Texas A&M game. Part of the Big 12 Conference, the **University of Texas** football team often fills the huge Darrell K. Royal/Texas Memorial Stadium (just west of I-35 btw. 23rd and 21st sts., E. Campus Dr., and San Jacinto Blvd.) during home games, played August through November.

**GOLF** Initiated in 2003 and boasting a $1.6-million purse, the **Triton Financial Classic** (✆ **512/732-2666**) is part of the PGA's Champions Tour, and is held at the Hills Country Club at Lakeway Resort in late April.

**HOCKEY** The **Austin Ice Bats** hockey team (✆ **512/927-PUCK** [927-7825]; www.icebats.com) has been getting anything but an icy reception from its Austin fans. This typically rowdy team plays at the Travis County Exposition Center, 7311 Decker Lane (about 15 min. east of UT). Tickets, which run from $10 to $35, are available at any UTTM outlet or from **Star Tickets** (✆ **888/597-STAR** [597-7827] or 512/469-SHOW [469-7469]; www.startickets.com). The team generally plays on weekends mid-October through late March; a phone call will get you the exact dates and times.

**ROLLER DERBY** Reincarnated in Austin in 2001, women's roller derby has become a popular pastime in Austin, which has spread to other cities. If you want to see some Austin quirkiness and celebrate low-brow culture in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, you can check out the **Lonestar Rollergirls** website (www.txrd.com) for upcoming action. Events are usually held every other Sunday at the Convention Center. There is also a flat-track league called the **Texas Rollergirls** (www.txrollergirls.com). Their season lasts from March to August, with bouts taking place at the Playland Skate Center at 8822 McCann Blvd., close to the intersection of Hwy. 183 and Burnet Road.



## 7 SHOPPING

### THE SHOPPING SCENE

Visitors to Austin don't really come for the shopping, but the opportunistic shopper can be rewarded with some wonderful discoveries. Folk art, arts and crafts, music, books—these are the areas where Austin excels. And it's got the rest of the material world pretty well covered, too.

## First Thursdays

As if there wasn't already enough street theater in Austin, the merchants on South Congress Avenue decided a few years back to start hosting a monthly street festival. They began keeping their doors open late and providing food, drinks, and entertainment on the first Thursday of every month. Soon impromptu open-air markets sprang up, and jugglers, drum circles, and of course live bands performed indoors, outdoors, and in between.

First Thursdays have become quite popular for their mix of shopping, entertainment, people-watching, and the surprise factor—you never know what you're going to meet up with. It's also a way for locals to celebrate the approach of the weekend. The street festival occupies about 8 blocks along both sides of South Congress. Traffic along the avenue is not cordoned off, but everyone drives slowly because of the crowds crisscrossing the avenue. It starts around 6pm and runs until about 10pm. To find out more, check www.firstthursday.info.



## SHOPPING AREAS

In central Austin, the best concentration of shops and galleries is to be found along **East 6th Street** near Congress Avenue, **West 6th Street and Lamar Boulevard, West 2nd Street** near Congress Avenue, and **South Congress Avenue** (or "**So-Co**"). So-Co has gotten quite a bit fancier in the past few years. The funkier, less expensive shops moved on to lower-rent **South 1st Street** and **South Lamar Boulevard.** There is also a cluster of stores in the vicinity of the intersection of **North Lamar and 38th Street.** Many stores on the **Drag**—the stretch of Guadalupe Street between Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and 26th Street, across from the University of Texas campus—are student oriented, but a wide range of clothing, gifts, toys, and, of course, books can also be found here.

If you're looking for a shopping center, the growth area seems to be in the northwest, where several upscale shopping centers vie for customers: the **Arboretum,** the **Arboretum Market,** the **Gateway Shopping Centers** (consisting of Gateway Courtyard, the Gateway Market, and Gateway Square), and the **Domain** have earned the area the nickname "South Dallas."

## THE GOODS A TO Z

### Art

It's not exactly SoHo, but the area just northwest of the capitol and south of the University of Texas—specifically, the block bounded by Guadalupe and Lavaca to the west and east and 17th and 18th streets to the south and north—has a large concentration of galleries. They include the group clustered in the **Guadalupe Arts Building,** 1705 Guadalupe, as well as Women & Their Work (see below).

Austin's commitment to music makes it a perfect location for **Wild About Music,** 115 E. 6th St. (✆ **512/708-1700;** www.wildaboutmusic.com), a gallery and shop strictly devoted to arts and crafts with a musical theme. **Women & Their Work,** 1710 Lavaca St. (✆ **512/477-1064;** www.womenandtheirwork.org), highlights more than visual art—it also promotes and showcases women in dance, music, theater, film, and literature.

"Outsider" art, created in the rural South, usually by the poor and sometimes by the incarcerated, is the focus of **Yard Dog Folk Art,** 1510 S. Congress Ave. (✆ **512/912-1613;** www.yarddog.com). Southwestern art can be found at **El Taller Gallery,** 2438 W. Anderson Lane (✆ **800/234-7362;** www.eltallergallery.com). Folk art and crafts from Latin America and around the world can be found at several stores: **Tesoros Trading Company,** 1500 S. Congress Ave. (✆ **512/447-7500;** www.tesoros.com); **Eclectic,** 700 N. Lamar Blvd. (✆ **512/477-1816**); and **Ten Thousand Villages,** 1317 S. Congress Ave. (✆ **512/440-0440;** www.villagesofaustin.org).

## Food

To see the ultimate in supermarkets, visit **Central Market,** 4001 N. Lamar (✆ **512/206-1000;** www.centralmarket.com), and the flagship store of **Whole Foods Markets** at 525 N. Lamar (✆ **512/476-1206;** www.wholefoods.com).

In addition to hosting some of the nation's most lavish grocery stores, Austin also has an abundance of farmers' markets. Perhaps the most notable of them, **Austin Farmers' Market,** held downtown at Republic Square Park, 4th Street at Guadalupe, every Saturday from 9am to 1pm March through November (✆ **512/236-0074;** www.austinfarmersmarket.com), features not only food products but also live music, cooking demonstrations, kids' activities, and workshops on everything from organic gardening to aromatherapy.

## Music

Carrying a huge selection of sounds, **Waterloo Records and Video,** 600A N. Lamar Blvd. (✆ **512/474-2500;** www.waterloorecords.com), is always the first in town to get the new releases. The store has a popular preview listening section, offers compilation tapes of Austin groups, and sells tickets to all major-label shows around town.

## Running Gear

Owned by the footwear editor for *Runner's World* magazine and serving as the official wear-test center for that publication, **Run-Tex,** 422 W. Riverside Dr. (✆ **512/472-3254;** www.runtex.com), not only has a huge inventory of shoes and other running gear, but also does everything it can to promote healthful jogging practices, even offering free running classes and a free injury-evaluation clinic. The store is right near Austin's favorite jogging trail, which encircles Lady Bird Lake.

## Texas Souvenirs

Over the years, visitors have admired—sometimes excessively—the intricately designed door hinges of the capitol. The gift shop at the **Capitol Visitors Center,** 112 E. 11th St. (✆ **512/305-8400;** www.texascapitolvisitorscenter.com), sells brass bookends made from the original model used, during the capitol's renovation, to cast replacements for hinges that were cadged over the years. Other Texana includes local food products and historical books. See also **Wild About Music,** listed under "Art," above.

## Western Wear

Name notwithstanding, **Allen's Boots,** 1522 S. Congress (✆ **512/447-1413**), sells a lot more than footwear. Come here too for hats, belts, jewelry, and other boot-scootin' accouterments (bring the youngins too). The custom-made boots of the **Capitol Saddlery,** 1614 Lavaca St. (✆ **512/478-9309;** www.capitolsaddlery.com), were immortalized in a song by Jerry Jeff Walker. This three-level store, in the same family for 7 decades, is a bit chaotic, but you can't beat it for authentic cowboy gear.

# 8 AUSTIN AFTER DARK

It's hard to imagine an itch for entertainment, high or low, that Austin couldn't scratch. For starters, live music is found everywhere and in just about every genre. And the level of virtuosity is impressive. Many famous musicians such as the Dixie Chicks and Shawn Colvin call Austin home and frequently perform here. But there is also a large number of lesser known but great performers, who for one reason or another are content to stay in Austin and enjoy a comfortable and modest level of success.

The live music scene is also extremely inexpensive. Some really good bands play for tips on weekdays and for starving-artist pay at other times. This has been true for years, and it makes you feel that the city is getting a lot more from this arrangement than it's having to put out. Not that Austin doesn't try to support its local musicians. Some group or other is always organizing benefit concerts or free public concerts to promote the local talent.

Keep an eye out for these kinds of performances by checking out the ***Austin Chronicle*** and ***XLent,*** the entertainment supplement of the *Austin-American Statesman.* Both are available in hundreds of outlets every Thursday.

But, for major shows, the quickest way to check out what's happening is to go to the website of **Austin Circle of Theaters:** www.acotonline.org. This is funded by the city and works with many venues. Click on "Now Playing Austin" for a well-organized calendar of events. To buy tickets there's a further link to another department: the **Austix Box Office** (✆ **512/474-8497;** www.austix.com). You can buy your tickets online and pick them up at the event, or you can go by the Austix office, located in the city's Visitor Center at 301 Congress Ave. Austix offers discount tickets and sometimes half-priced, last-minute tickets.

**Front Gate Tickets** (✆ **512/389-0315;** www.frontgatetickets.com) is another option. It handles Austin City Limits Festival tickets as well as those for some of the shows at larger clubs like Stubb's, Antone's, La Zona Rosa, the Parish, and Emo's.

The University of Texas brings many touring performances to town and also hosts local concerts and productions. You can reach Texas Box Office at www.texasboxoffice.com or ✆ **512/477-6060;** there are also outlets in most HEB grocery stores.

## THE PERFORMING ARTS

With completion of the **Long Center for the Performing Arts** (✆ **512/457-5500;** www.thelongcenter.org), Austin now has a new venue for its symphony orchestra, opera, and ballet performances and for visiting performances as well. The new hall, set on the south shore of Lady Bird Lake, was designed to take advantage of its location. A raised terrace framed by a circular colonnade looks out over the lake, to the downtown skyline. The grand concert hall, named after Michael and Susan Dell, seats 2,400 people. There's also a studio theater for small performances.

The University of Texas's **Performing Arts Center (PAC)** (✆ **512/471-2787;** www.utpac.org) attracts major shows, including Broadway musicals, pop singers, and classical music ensembles. It has six theaters, the largest of which, Bass Hall, is just finishing major renovation. It also is the venue for some performances by university theater and dance groups.

## Opera & Classical Music

A resident in Austin since 1911, the **Austin Symphony,** 1101 Red River St. ✆ **888/4-MAESTRO** [462-3787] or 512/476-6064; www.austinsymphony.org), performs most of its classical works at Bass Concert Hall. The city's first professional opera company, **Austin Lyric Opera,** 901 Barton Springs Rd. (✆ **512/472-5992** for box office; www.austinlyricopera.org), presents three or four productions annually. The **Austin Chamber Music Center,** 4930 Burnet Rd., Ste. 203 (✆ **512/454-7562** or 454-0026; www.austinchambermusic.org), features an Intimate Concert series, held at private residences, and hosts visiting national and international artists.

## Theater

Austin's oldest theater, incorporated in 1933, the **Zachary Scott Theatre Center** (✆ **512/476-0541** [box office] or 476-0594; www.zachscott.com) makes use of two adjacent venues at the edge of Zilker Park: the John E. Whisenhunt Arena at 1510 Toomey Rd., and the theater-in-the-round Kleburg at 1421 W. Riverside Dr.

## Dance

The two dozen professional dancers of **Ballet Austin** (✆ **512/476-2163** [box office] or 476-9051; www.balletaustin.org) leap and bound in such classics as *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake,* as well as in the more avant-garde pieces of the trendsetting *Director's Choice* series, which pairs the work of various contemporary choreographers with the music of popular local Latin musicians and singer-songwriters. When in town, the troupe performs at the Long Center.

# THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

Music was always important to life in Austin, but it became a big deal in the early '70s with the advent of "progressive country" (aka redneck rock). Local boy Willie Nelson became its principal proponent, along with several other Austin musicians. And the Armadillo World Headquarters, a music hall known for hosting all the '60s rock bands, became the center of events and symbolized the marriage of country with counterculture. The city has since become an incubator for a wonderfully vital, crossbred alternative sound that mixes rock, country, folk, blues, punk, and Tejano. Although the Armadillo is now gone, live music in Austin continues to thrive in bars all across central Austin.

While **Sixth Street** (btw. Congress Ave. and Red River St.) is well known to many outsiders and is home to some good bars, just as popular but less famous is the **Warehouse District** (just west of Congress Ave. btw. 2nd and 5th sts.), with more glitz than grunge. And for those wanting exposure to more of the local sound, there are cheap dives just off Sixth, on **Red River Street** (btw. 6th and 10th sts.). And then there are the many venues that don't fall inside these districts, like the Continental Club and the Saxon Pub. There's a lot to explore.

## Folk & Country

**Broken Spoke** ★★, 3201 S. Lamar Blvd. (✆ **512/442-6189;** www.brokenspokeaustintx.com), is one of the great country music dance halls. It dates back to 1964 when this level of South Lamar was the edge of town. People would come out here to two-step across the large wood-plank floor. It hasn't changed much, except for the occasional busload of

 tourists that stops by. This is Austin, so you don't have to be all duded up for dancing here. Granted, boot-scootin' is nice to do with real boots, but lots of people show up in sneakers and Hawaiian shirts. You can eat in a large, open room out front (the chicken-fried steak can't be beat), or take your longnecks back to a table overlooking the dance floor. Cover ranges from $5 to $15.

## Jazz & Blues

**Antone's,** 213 W. 5th St. (✆ **512/320-8424;** www.antones.net), has been synonymous with the blues. Stevie Ray Vaughan used to be a regular, and when major blues artists like Buddy Guy or Etta James venture down this way, you can be sure they'll be either playing Antone's or stopping by for a surprise set. The **Elephant Room,** 315 Congress Ave. (✆ **512/473-2279;** www.elephantroom.com), is an intimate space that's as dark and smoky as befits a jazz den.

## Rock

Austin's last word in alternative music, **Emo's,** 603 Red River St. (✆ **512/477-EMOS** [3667]; www.emosaustin.com), draws acts of all sizes and flavors, from Gang Green to Green Day. It primarily attracts college kids, but you won't really feel out of place at any age. Another good representative of the hot new music scene along Red River north of 6th Street, the **Red-Eyed Fly,** 715 Red River St. (✆ **512/474-1084;** www.redeyedfly.com), showcases Texas's top hard-rock, pop, and punk bands—as well as national touring acts—at its great outdoor stage. Inside, the jukebox rocks with local sounds.

## Singer/Songwriter

A small, dark cavern with great acoustics and a fully stocked bar, the **Cactus Cafe,** Texas Union, University of Texas campus (24th and Guadalupe; ✆ **512/475-6515;** www.utexas.edu/student/txunion/ae/cactus), is singer/songwriter heaven. The attentive listening vibes attract the likes of Alison Krauss and Suzanne Vega, along with well-known acoustic combos.

## Eclectic

A terrific sound system and a casual country atmosphere have helped make **The Backyard,** Tex. 71 West at R.R. 620, Bee Cave (✆ **512/263-4146**), one of Austin's hottest venues. Since it opened in the early 1990s, the Allman Brothers, Elvis Costello, Norah Jones, k.d. lang, and Bonnie Raitt have all played the terraced outdoor amphitheater. An Austin classic, **La Zona Rosa,** 612 W. 4th St. (✆ **512/263-4146;** www.lazonarosa.com), has departed from its funky roots a bit to feature bigger names and bigger covers than in the past. But this renovated garage filled with kitschy memorabilia is still a prime spot to listen to good bands. Within the rough limestone walls of **Stubb's,** 801 Red River St. (✆ **512/480-8341;** www.stubbsaustin.com), you'll find great barbecue, three friendly bars, and terrific music ranging from singer/songwriter solos to hip-hop open mics to all-out country jams. Out back, the Waller Amphitheatre hosts some of the bigger acts. The Sunday gospel brunches are fast becoming an Austin institution. The **Saxon Pub,** at 1320 S. Lamar Blvd. (✆ **512/448-2552;** www.thesaxonpub.com), is a longtime local favorite. The crowd is older and more laid-back, and the volume is a lower than at most of the Sixth Street bars. Check the calendar on the club's website, and you'll find performers who rarely play in such a small venue.

## THE BAR SCENE

### A Historic Bar

Since 1866, when councilman August Scholz first opened his tavern near the state capitol, every Texas governor has visited **Scholz Garten,** 1607 San Jacinto Blvd. (✆ **512/474-1958;** www.scholzgarten.net), at least once (and many quite a few more times). An extensive menu combines barbecue favorites with traditional bratwurst and sauerkraut; a state-of-the-art sound system cranks out polka tunes; and patio tables and a few strategically placed TV sets help Longhorn fans cheer on their team. All in all, a great place to drink in some Austin history.

### Gay & Lesbian Scene

Its name notwithstanding, **Oilcan Harry's,** 211 W. 4th St. (✆ **512/320-8823;** www.oilcanharrys.com), attracts a clean-cut, upscale Warehouse District crowd, while the **Rainbow Cattle Co.,** 305 W. 5th St. (✆ **512/472-5288;** www.rainbowcattleco.com), is Austin's prime gay country-and-western dance hall. It's about 75% male, but also attracts a fair share of lesbian two-steppers, especially on Thursday, which is Ladies Night.

### Local Favorites

The **Cedar Door,** 201 Brazos (✆ **512/473-3712;** www.cedardooraustin.com), remains Austin's favorite neighborhood bar, drawing a group of potluck regulars ranging from hippies to journalists and politicos.

## 9 HILL COUNTRY SIDE TRIPS FROM AUSTIN

The following destinations in Texas's Hill Country, one of the state's prettiest regions, can be visited on day trips from Austin, but you really should overnight in the area. Trips to the locations detailed here can easily be combined with those described in the "Hill Country Side Trips from San Antonio" section, in chapter 8. To locate these towns, see the "South-Central Texas" map on p. 255.

## FREDERICKSBURG ★

Fredericksburg is a town of 10,000 inhabitants located just about 75 miles from either San Antonio or Austin. (All the towns mentioned until now are closer to San Antonio.) Fredericksburg is a town noted for its picturesque main street—old-time storefronts with sidewalk canopies, in the tradition of small-town Texas. It's also known for its German heritage. It was the center of a large German farming community. These days, the farmers are known for the peaches they grow (available at orchards and roadside stands May–July), and more recently their vineyards. Fredericksburg is the hub of the Hill Country wineries.

The town serves as a weekend escape for city dwellers in San Antonio and Austin. It has lots of bed-and-breakfasts and guesthouses, as well as hotels and motels. Many visitors come for the shopping and to relax, and perhaps taste some wine. Others come to explore the surrounding countryside, including nearby Enchanted Rock, the Hill Country's most famous geological feature.

### Seeing the Sights

The **Visitor Information Center,** 302 E. Austin St., Fredericksburg, TX 78624 (✆ **888/997-3600** or 830/997-6523), can direct you to the many points of interest in the town's

historic district. These include a number of little **Sunday Houses,** built by German settlers in distant rural areas because they needed a place to stay overnight when they came to town to trade or attend church.

On the town's main square, called Market Square, is an unusual octagonal **Vereins Kirche (Society Church).** It's actually a replica (built in 1935) of the original 1847 building. The original was the first public building in Fredericksburg. It was built to be a church where both Lutheran and Catholic Germans could hold services, and as such, was a symbol of unity for the early pioneers. Inside is a history exhibit of the town, which can be viewed in a half-hour. It's open 10am to 4pm Monday to Saturday, 1 to 4pm Sunday. The Vereins Kirche is operated by the Historical Society, which also maintains the **Pioneer Museum Complex,** 309 W. Main St. Admission to either museum is valid for the other. The cost is $5 for adults, $3 for students 6 to 17 years old, and free for children 5 and under. The Pioneer Museum consists of the 1849 Kammlah House (which was a family residence and general store until the 1920s), as well as the barn and the smokehouse. Later, other historical structures were moved onto the site. These include a one-room schoolhouse and a blacksmith's forge. The complex is open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm, Sunday 1 to 5pm. For information on both places and on the other historical structures in town, phone ✆ **830/997-2835** or log on to www.pioneermuseum.com.

The 1852 Steamboat Hotel, originally owned by the grandfather of World War II naval hero Chester A. Nimitz, is now part of the **National Museum of the Pacific War** ★★, 311 E. Austin St. (✆ **830/997-4379;** www.nimitz-museum.org), a 9-acre Texas State Historical Park and the world's only museum focusing solely on the Pacific theater. It just keeps expanding and getting better. In addition to the exhibits in the steamboat-shaped hotel devoted to Nimitz and his comrades, there are also the Japanese Garden of Peace, a gift from the people of Japan; the Memorial Wall, the equivalent of the Vietnam wall for Pacific War veterans; the life-size Pacific Combat Zone (2½ blocks east of the museum), which replicates a World War II battle scene; and the George Bush Gallery, where you can see a captured Japanese midget submarine and a multimedia simulation of a bombing raid on Guadalcanal. Indoor exhibits are open daily from 9am to 5pm. Adult admission is $7; seniors, military, and veterans $6; students pay $4; and children 5 and under enter free.

## Nearby

North of town is **Enchanted Rock State Natural Area** ★★ (✆ **325/247-3903;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/enchantd), a 640-acre site with a dome of solid pink granite that was pushed up to the surface by volcanic uplifting. Take FM 965 north for 18 miles. You'll know when you get there. It's a stark sight that shares nothing in common with the surrounding hills. The dome is almost 600 feet high. To hike up and down on the trail takes about an hour. Though the park is fairly large, the parking lot is not, and as soon as it fills, no more visitors are admitted. On weekends, if you get there by 10am, you shouldn't have a problem. The park is open daily 8am to 10pm; day-use entrance fees are $6 adults and free for children 12 and under.

## Where to Stay

Fredericksburg is well known for having more than 300 bed-and-breakfasts and *Gästehauses* (guest cottages). Guesthouses are more private than the typical B&B. Either breakfast is provided the night before—the perishables are left in a refrigerator—or guests are given coupons to enjoy breakfast at a local restaurant. *Gästehauses* run anywhere from $120 to $200. Most visitors reserve lodgings through one of the main booking services:

**Be My Guest,** 110 N. Milam (✆ **866/997-7227** or 830/997-7227); **First Class Bed & Breakfast Reservation Service,** 909 E. Main (✆ **888/991-6749** or 830/997-0443; www.fredericksburg-lodging.com); **Gästehaus Schmidt,** 231 W. Main St. (✆ **866/427-8374** or 830/997-5612; www.fbglodging.com); and **Main Street B&B Reservation Service,** 337 E. Main (✆ **888/559-8555** or 830/997-0153; www.travelmainstreet.com). Specializing in the more familiar type of B&B is **Fredericksburg Traditional Bed & Breakfast Inns** (✆ **800/494-4678;** www.fredericksburgtrad.com). For something less traditional, consider the **Roadrunner Inn** (✆ **830/997-1844;** www.theroadrunnerinn.com), a modern B&B at 306 E. Main St. above a boutique. It has very large, uncluttered rooms furnished with a mix of mod and industrial. Rates start at $150.

If you would rather stay in a hotel, the **Hangar Hotel,** 155 Airport Rd., Fredericksburg, TX 78624 (✆ **830/997-9990;** www.hangarhotel.com), has large, comfortable rooms. It banks on nostalgia for the World War II flyboy era. Located, as the name suggests, at the town's tiny private airport, this hotel hearkens back to the 1940s with its clean-lined art moderne–style rooms, as well as an officer's club (democratically open to all) and retro diner. The re-creation isn't taken too far: Rooms have all the mod-cons. Rates—which include one $5 "food ration," good at the diner, per night—run from $120 on weekdays to $170 on weekends. For bargain rates, the old **Frederick Motel** (✆ **800/996-6050;** www.frederick-motel.com), at 1308 E. Main St., offers rates from $40 to $100 and on weekends includes full breakfast.

## Where to Dine

Fredericksburg's dining scene is diverse, catering to the traditional and the trendy alike. For breakfast or lunch, a jewel of a place is **Rather Sweet Bakery & Cafe,** 249 E. Main St. (✆ **830/990-0498**). Rebecca Rather, the owner, is a noted cookbook author, who makes everything from scratch using the freshest ingredients, including homegrown herbs and vegetables. The bakery is open Monday through Saturday until 5pm, but the cafe stops serving lunch at 2pm. For breakfast takeout, you should try **Hilda's Tortilla Factory** (✆ **830/997-6105**) at 149 Tivydale Rd. (at S. Adams St.). This place serves good tacos on fresh-made flour tortillas. "El Especial" has poblano, eggs, beans, bacon, and tomatoes. Be sure to ask for a couple of packs of green sauce. Often there's a line stretching out the door, but it moves quickly. If you've come to Fredericksburg for German food, you can try **Altdorf Biergarten,** 301 W. Main St. (✆ **830/997-7865**), open Wednesday to Monday for lunch and dinner, Sunday for brunch.

If you don't mind driving 10 miles, a great place to go for dinner (or for lunch on the weekend) is the **Hill Top Cafe** (✆ **830/997-8922;** www.hilltopcafe.com), on Hwy. 87 to Mason. This was an old country gas station that was converted into a restaurant by John and Brenda Nichols. John used to be a member of a legendary Austin band called Asleep at the Wheel. He usually plays music on Friday and Saturday evenings. Brenda runs the kitchen, and the food is well-prepared—American with a smattering of Greek and Cajun dishes. Reservations are highly recommended.

# LYNDON B. JOHNSON COUNTRY

Fifty miles west of Austin is Johnson City, where the forebears of the 36th president settled almost 150 years ago. A visit to LBJ's boyhood home (in Johnson City) and the sprawling ranch that became known as the Texas White House (14 miles farther west, near Stonewall), and other attractions can take a whole day. Even if you're not usually drawn to the past, you're likely to be intrigued by the picture of LBJ and his origins that these sites depict.

From Fredericksburg, take U.S. 290 east for 16 miles to the entrance of the **Lyndon B. Johnson State and National Historical Parks at LBJ Ranch** ★, near Stonewall, jointly operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (✆ **830/644-2252;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/lbj) and the National Park Service (✆ **830/868-7128;** www.nps.gov/lyjo). To visit the ranch, you need to stop at the park and get a permit. The ranch, which is just the other side of the Pedernales River, was used by LBJ as a second White House, and Lady Bird lived here until she died in 2008. A reconstructed version of the former president's modest birthplace lies close to his final resting place. The state park has a few attractions, including the **Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm,** where costumed interpreters give visitors a look at typical Texas-German farm life at the turn of the 20th century. Nearby are nature trails, a swimming pool (open only in summer), and lots of picnic spots.

It's 14 miles farther east along U.S. 290 to **Johnson City,** a pleasant agricultural town named for founder James Polk Johnson, LBJ's first cousin once removed. The modest white clapboard **Boyhood Home** ★, where Lyndon was raised after age 5, is the centerpiece of this unit of the national historical park. Before exploring, stop at the **visitor center** (✆ **830/868-7128**)—take F Street to Lady Bird Lane and you'll see the signs—to see an educational film and to get details about touring the Boyhood Home. The Boyhood Home and visitor center are open from 8:45am to 5pm daily; admission is free.

## Beyond LBJ: What to Do, Where to Eat & Stay

Several low-key antiques shops dot Main Street in Johnson City. Perhaps the best is the **Old Lumber Yard,** 209 E. Main St. (✆ **830/868-2381**), selling reasonably priced items from a variety of eras, including the present one. One of the highlights of the complex is the **Silver K Cafe** (✆ **830/868-2911**), where soups, salads, and sandwiches are served at lunchtime from Monday to Saturday. Thursday through Saturday evenings, you might dine on Gulf Coast cioppino, perhaps, or pan-grilled top sirloin with mustard sauce. Prices range from moderate to expensive. If you prefer your meats more portable, visit **Whittington's,** 602 Hwy. 281 S. (✆ **877/868-5501**), renowned around Texas for its beef and turkey jerky (just drop in for a sample; fresh jerky bears little resemblance to the convenience store kind).

The area's top place to dine—and to bed down—is about 16 miles to the west. You'll drive down a rural back road to reach **Rose Hill Manor,** 2614 Upper Albert Rd., Stonewall, TX 78671 (✆ **877/ROSEHIL** [767-3445] or 830/644-2247; www.rose-hill.com), a reconstructed southern manse. Light and airy accommodations—four in the main house, and six in separate cottages—are beautifully but comfortably furnished with antiques. All offer porches or patios and great Hill Country views. Rates run from $155 to $179 on weekdays, and $199 to $249 on weekends. The inn's New American cuisine, served Wednesday through Sunday evenings in an ultraromantic dining room, is outstanding. Reservations are essential.

The **Johnson Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau,** 604 Hwy. 281 S., Johnson City, TX 78636 (✆ **830/868-7684;** www.johnsoncitytexaschamber.com), can provide information about other local dining, lodging, and shopping options.

## NEW BRAUNFELS & GRUENE

New Braunfels sits at the junction of the Comal and Guadalupe rivers. German settlers were brought here in 1845 by Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, the commissioner general of the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, the same group that later founded Fredericksburg. Although Prince Carl returned to Germany within a year

to marry his fiancée, who refused to join him in the wilderness, his colony prospered. By the 1850s, New Braunfels was the fourth-largest city in Texas after Houston, San Antonio, and Galveston. Although you have to look a little to find its quainter side today, this is a good place to enjoy a bit of Germanic history—and a lot of watersports.

## Exploring New Braunfels

At the **New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce,** 390 S. Seguin, New Braunfels, TX 78130 (✆ **800/572-2626** or 830/625-2385; www.nbjumpin.com), you can pick up a pamphlet detailing the 40-point **historic walking tour** of midtown. Highlights include the Romanesque-Gothic Comal County Courthouse (1898) on Main Plaza; the nearby Jacob Schmidt Building (193 W. San Antonio), built on the site where William Gebhardt, of canned chili fame, perfected his formula for chili powder in 1896; and the 1928 Faust Hotel (240 S. Seguin), believed by some to be haunted by its owner.

Several small museums are worth a visit. Prince Carl never did build a planned castle for his sweetheart, Sophia, on the elevated spot where the **Sophienburg Museum,** 401 W. Coll St. (✆ **830/629-1572;** www.sophienburg.org), now stands, but it's nevertheless an excellent place to learn about the history of New Braunfels and other Hill Country settlements. The **Museum of Texas Handmade Furniture** ★, 1370 Church Hill Dr. (✆ **830/629-6504;** www.nbheritagevillage.com), also sheds light on local domestic life of the 19th century with its beautiful examples of Texas Biedermeier by master craftsman Johan Michael Jahn. They're displayed at the gracious 1858 Breustedt-Dillon Haus. The 11-acre Heritage Village complex also includes an 1848 log cabin and a barn that houses a reproduction cabinetmaker's workshop.

## Historic Gruene ★★

Get a more concentrated glimpse of the past at Gruene (pronounced "Green"), 4 miles northwest of downtown New Braunfels. First settled by German farmers in the 1840s, Gruene was virtually abandoned during the Depression in the 1930s. It remained a ghost town until the mid-1970s, when two investors realized the value of its intact historic buildings and sold them to businesses rather than raze them. These days, tiny Gruene is crowded with day-trippers browsing the specialty shops in the wonderfully restored structures, which include a smoked-meat shop, lots of cutesy gift boutiques, and several antiques shops.

The **New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music** ★, 1259 Gruene Rd., on the river behind Gruene Mansion (✆ **800/456-4866** or 830/625-5636), focuses on popular arts in the West and South (as opposed to, say, high culture and the classics). Subjects of recent exhibits, which change quarterly and combine music and art components, have included Texas accordion music, central Texas dance halls, and cowboy art and poetry. Live music throughout the year includes an open mic on Sunday afternoons, and the recording of *New Braunfels Live* radio show of roots music on Thursday evenings. A brochure detailing the town's retailers, restaurants, and accommodations is available from the New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce (see above) or at local shops.

## Watersports

Gruene also figures among the New Braunfels area's impressive array of places to get wet, most of them open only in summer. Outfitters who can help you ride the Guadalupe River rapids on raft, tube, canoe, or inflatable kayak include **Rockin' R River Rides** (✆ **800/553-5628** or 830/629-9999; www.rockinr.com) and **Gruene River Company** (✆ **888/705-2800** or 830/625-2800; www.toobing.com), both on Gruene Road just

south of the Gruene Bridge. You can go tubing too, at **Schlitterbahn** ★, Texas's largest water park and one of the best in the country, 305 W. Austin St. in New Braunfels (✆ **830/625-2351;** www.schlitterbahn.com). Those who like their water play a bit more low-key might try downtown New Braunfels's **Landa Park** (✆ **830/608-2160**), where you can either swim in the largest spring-fed pool in Texas or calmly float in an inner tube down the Comal River.

## Where to Stay in New Braunfels & Gruene

A prime downtown location, a tree-shaded courtyard, and gorgeously florid, high Victorian–style sleeping quarters have put accommodations at the **Prince Solms Inn,** 295 E. San Antonio St., New Braunfels (✆ **800/625-9169** or 830/625-9169; www.princesolmsinn.com), in great demand. Three Western-themed rooms in a converted 1860 feed store next door are ideal for families. Rates range from $125 to $175.

For history with a river view, consider the **Gruene Mansion Inn,** 1275 Gruene Rd., New Braunfels, TX 78130 (✆ **830/629-2641;** www.gruenemansioninn.com). The barns that once belonged to the opulent 1875 plantation house were converted to rustic elegant cottages with decks; some also offer cozy lofts (if you don't like stairs, request a single-level room). Accommodations for two go from $170 to $240 per night, including breakfast served in the plantation house. Two separate lodges, suitable for families, are available, too ($260–$340).

The nearby **Gruene Apple Bed and Breakfast,** 1235 Gruene Rd. (✆ **830/643-1234;** www.grueneapple.com), set on a bluff overlooking the Guadalupe River, is less historic, more upscale. This opulent limestone mansion, built expressly to serve as an inn, hosts 14 luxurious theme rooms, from "Wild West" and "Shady Lady" to the more decorous "1776"; many look out on the river from private balconies. On-site recreation includes a natural stone swimming pool, hot tub, pool table, player piano—even a small movie theater. Doubles range from $175 to $235; midweek discounts available.

## Where to Dine in New Braunfels & Gruene

The **New Braunfels Smokehouse,** 140 Hwy. 46 S., at I-35 (✆ **830/625-2416;** www.nbsmokehouse.com), opened in 1951 as a tasting room for the meats it started hickory-smoking in 1943. Savor it in platters or on sandwiches, or have some shipped home as a savory souvenir. The far newer **Huisache Grill,** 303 W. San Antonio St. (✆ **830/620-9001;** www.huisache.com), has an updated American menu that draws foodies from as far as San Antonio. An even more recent arrival on downtown's fine-dining scene, **Myron's,** 136 Castell Rd. (✆ **830/624-1024;** www.myronsprimesteakhouse.com), serves perfectly prepared Chicago prime steak in a retro swank dining room (a converted 1920s movie palace).

In Gruene, the **Gristmill River Restaurant & Bar,** 1287 Gruene Rd. (✆ **830/625-0684;** www.gristmillrestaurant.com), a converted 100-year-old cotton gin, includes burgers and chicken-fried steak as well as healthful salads on its Texas-casual menu. Kick back on one of its multiple decks and gaze out at the Guadalupe River.

## New Braunfels & Gruene After Dark

Lyle Lovett and Garth Brooks are just a few of the big names who have played **Gruene Hall** ★★, Gruene Road, corner of Hunter Road (✆ **830/629-7077;** www.gruenehall.com), the oldest country-and-western dance hall in Texas and still one of the state's most outstanding spots for live music.

10

# West Texas

*by Eric Peterson*

This is the real Texas: vast open spaces; longhorn cattle; pickup trucks lined up in front of roadside honky-tonks; and deeply tanned cowboys with sweat-stained hats, slim-cut jeans, and muddy boots. While most of Texas has become quite metropolitan—the vast majority of the state's residents live in cities—the plains of West Texas retain much of the Old West flavor. Communities here are generally small and far apart, residents seldom lock their doors, and even the region's biggest city, El Paso, feels like an overgrown small town. For those willing to take the time and effort, this area is filled with gems: a wide range of people, attractions, and activities amid a landscape that's alternately bleak and beautiful.

The region's history and culture come alive at numerous museums and historic sites, such as Spanish missions from the 17th and 18th centuries, several restored frontier forts, and the combination courtroom and saloon used in the late 1800s by Judge Roy Bean, the self-styled "Law West of the Pecos." West Texas also offers some surprises, including one of America's most beautiful caves; the state's oldest winery; a replica of William Shakespeare's famed Globe Theatre; an avant-garde installation art complex in the much-hyped town of Marfa; and numerous lakes, including 67,000-acre Lake Amistad, a national recreation area along the U.S.–Mexico border that is a joint project of both countries.

## 1 EL PASO

43 miles SE of Las Cruces, New Mexico; 564 miles NW of San Antonio; 617 miles W of Dallas

Here, in the sun-swept, mountainous desert of Texas's westernmost corner, is El Paso, the state's fifth-largest city. Built between two mountain ranges on the shores of the Rio Grande, the city is an urban history book, with chapters dedicated to Spanish conquistadors, ancient highways, gunfighters, border disputes, and modern sprawl.

El Paso's rich history is a result of its geography. The Franklin Mountains, which now border the downtown area and occupy the city's heart, offered natural defense for the American Indians who inhabited the area for more than 10 millenniums; the Rio Grande offered water. As the mountains slope into a vast canyon, the Spanish explorers who first crossed the Rio Grande in the 16th century saw it as an ideal north-south route, one that soon became known as the "Camino Real" (or "King's Highway") and served as a principal trade route for nearly 300 years.

With the 17th century came an influx of Catholic missionaries, a group that established numerous missions that survive today. But Spain saw its grip weaken, and a Mexican flag flew over El Paso when independence was established in 1821. This era was short-lived, as Mexico ceded the land north of the Rio Grande to the United States following the Mexican-American War (1846–48). After the railroad arrived in 1881, El Paso became a commercial center and also earned the nickname "Sin City," thanks to the

saloons, brothels, and casinos that lined every major street. Many notorious gunfighters—including Billy the Kid and John Wesley Hardin—called the city home.

El Paso boomed in the early 20th century and again following World War II, entrenching itself as a center for agriculture, manufacturing, and international trade. The city's relationship with Ciudad Juárez has been symbiotic for centuries, even more so since the resolution of a century-old border dispute in the 1960s and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. Unfortunately, increased border security and a wave of drug-related violence in Juárez have put a damper on the sister cities' relationship in recent years.

Nevertheless, in comparison with the relative wealth and glitz of Santa Fe or Tucson, El Paso is in many ways the authentic Southwest—unpolished, undiluted, and honest. Separated by a swath of the Rio Grande, El Paso and Ciudad Juárez each represent their country's largest border city, and the local culture, a fusion of Mexican and American traditions, is distinct and unique in comparison to the way of life in eastern Texas. A day or two of exploration is worthwhile; take the time to wander downtown, enjoy a meal at one of the city's terrific Mexican restaurants, and gain a better understanding of what a border town is all about.

## ESSENTIALS

### Getting There

**BY PLANE** More than 125 commercial flights arrive and depart daily from **El Paso International Airport,** located a mile north of I-10 via Airway Boulevard on the city's east side (✆ **915/780-4749;** www.elpasointernationalairport.com). **American, US Airways, Delta, Continental, United, Southwest, Frontier,** and **New Mexico Airlines** all serve El Paso.

The major car-rental agencies are represented here; see "Getting Around," below. **El Paso/Juárez Shuttle Service** (✆ **915/740-4400**) offers shuttle service to and from the airport (a 15-min. trip each way); a one-way trip downtown costs about $25.

**BY CAR** The main artery to the east and west is I-10, bisecting El Paso between downtown and the Franklin Mountains.

From Carlsbad Caverns (160 miles from El Paso) and Guadalupe Mountains National Parks to the east (about 130 miles), visitors arrive via U.S. 62/180 (Montana Ave.), which eventually skirts the north side of downtown El Paso. For those arriving from Alamogordo, New Mexico (80 miles to the north), U.S. 54 (also known as the Patriot Fwy.) runs through El Paso's east side to the Bridge of the Americas, which crosses the Rio Grande and connects El Paso with Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

**BY BUS** Interstate and intrastate bus service is provided by **Greyhound,** 200 W. San Antonio Dr. (✆ **915/532-2365;** www.greyhound.com).

**BY TRAIN** **Amtrak** (✆ **800/872-7245;** www.amtrak.com) offers westward rail service on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday and eastward rail service on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. Trains go east to Chicago (via San Antonio) and west to Los Angeles; other major cities on the routes include Houston and Tucson. The depot is located downtown at 700 San Francisco St.

### Getting Around

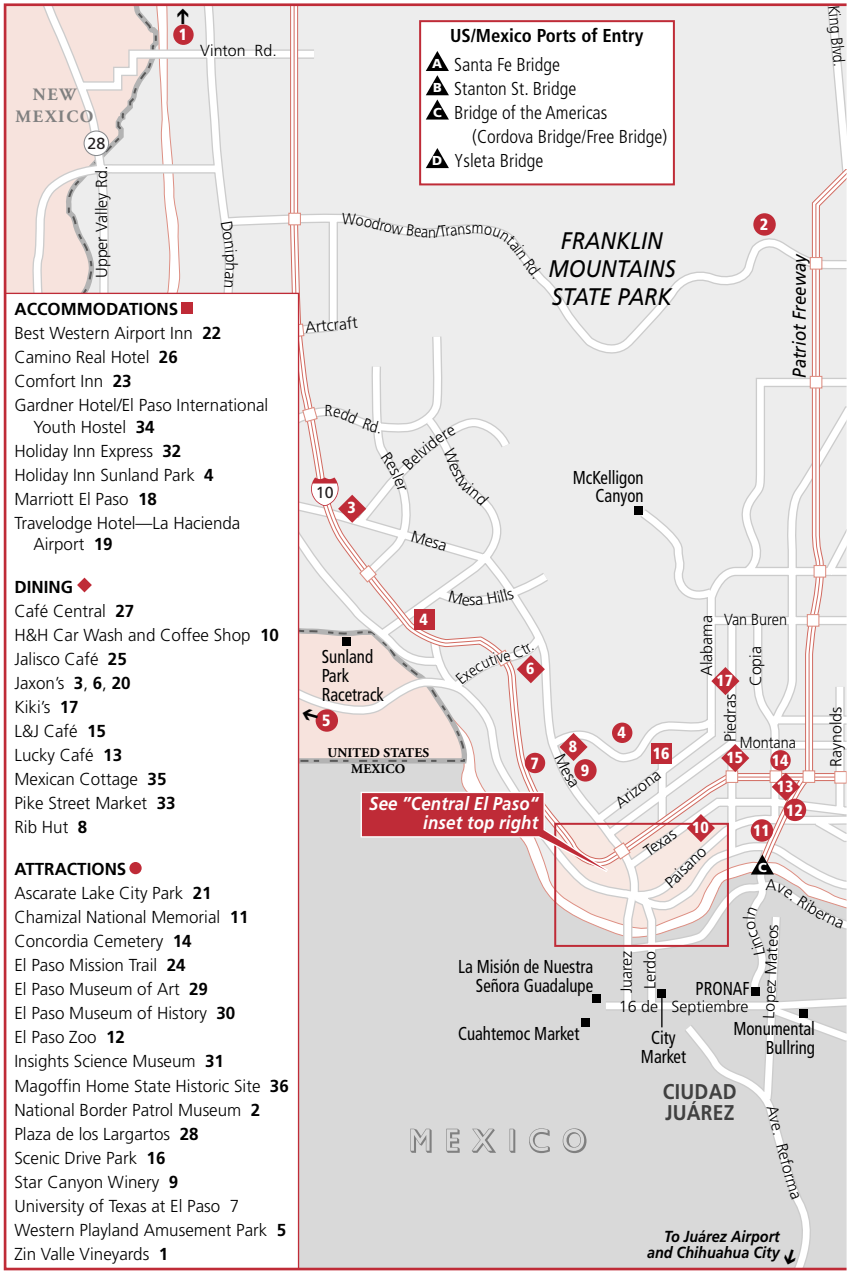
Two natural features—the Rio Grande and the Franklin Mountains—have guided the urban development of El Paso for more than 400 years, so getting around can be a bit tricky for the newcomer. The city is essentially U-shaped, with the Franklin Mountains occupying the center and the downtown area at the bottom.

While El Paso has a public bus system, cars are the norm. Parking is rarely an issue, even downtown.

**BY CAR** There are numerous car-rental agencies in El Paso, clustered primarily around the airport in the east, and North Mesa Street on the city's west side, including **Avis** (✆ 915/779-2700; www.avis.com); **Enterprise** (✆ 915/779-2260; www.enterprise.com); **Hertz** (✆ 915/772-4255; www.hertz.com); and **Dollar** (✆ 915/778-5445; www.dollar.com). The **American Automobile Association (AAA)** maintains an office in El Paso at 655 Sunland Park Dr. (✆ 800/765-0766 or 915/778-9521; www.aaa.com), open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

Street parking is free almost everywhere in El Paso except downtown, where the meters must be fed 25¢ per half-hour. The covered garages downtown charge $3 to $10 per day. There are also many outdoor lots that are geared toward people going on day trips to Ciudad Juárez. These usually run $2 to $6 per day.

**BY BUS** El Paso's bus system, **Sun Metro** (✆ **915/533-3333;** www.elpasotexas.gov/sunmetro), operates one of the world's largest fleets of natural gas–powered buses. The main transfer station is downtown on Franklin Street between Mesa and Santa Fe streets. There are also trolleys that run between the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)




**ACCOMMODATIONS** ■
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Camino Real Hotel **26**
Comfort Inn **23**
Gardner Hotel/El Paso International Youth Hostel **34**
Holiday Inn Express **32**
Holiday Inn Sunland Park **4**
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H&H Car Wash and Coffee Shop **10**
Jalisco Café **25**
Jaxon's **3**, **6**, **20**
Kiki's **17**
L&J Café **15**
Lucky Café **13**
Mexican Cottage **35**
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**ATTRACTIONS** ●
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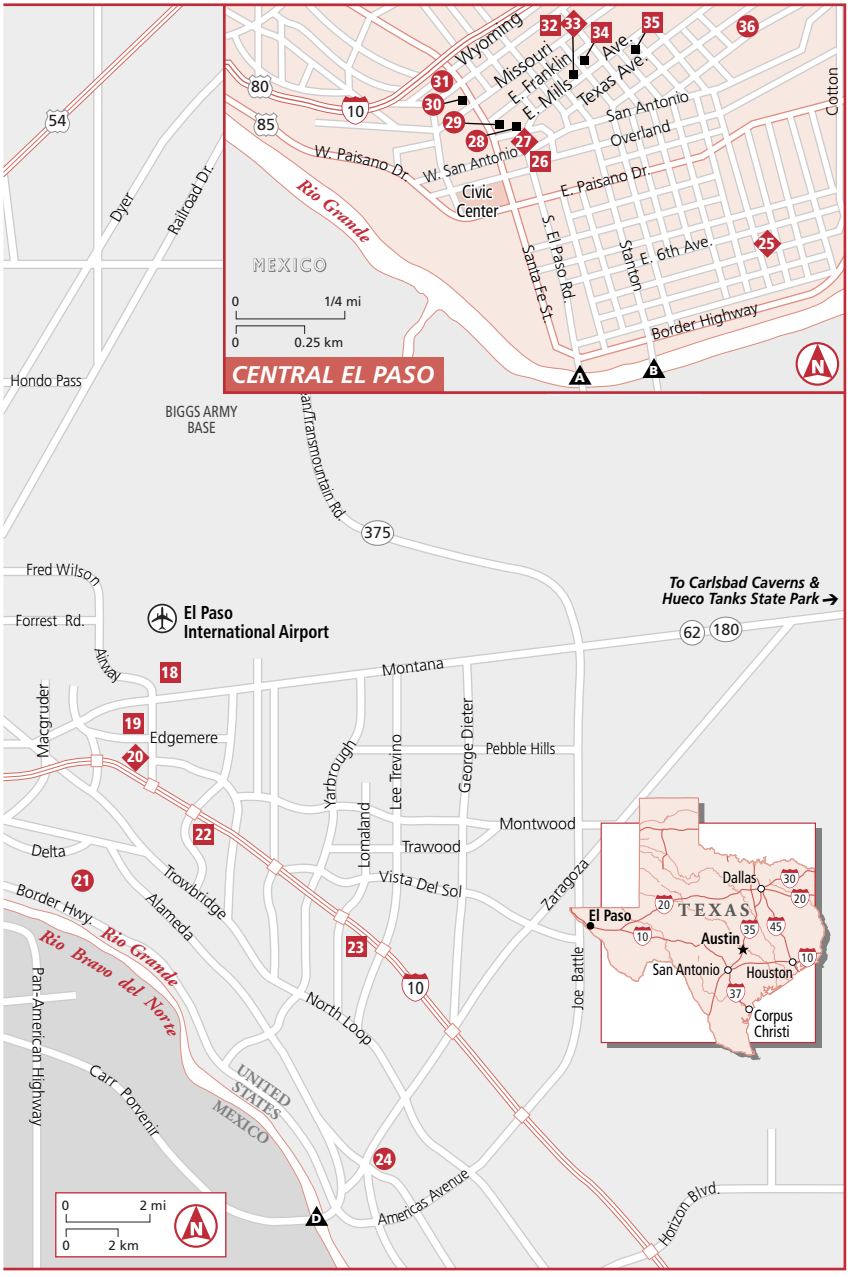
Star Canyon Winery **9**
University of Texas at El Paso 7
Western Playland Amusement Park **5**
Zin Valle Vineyards **1**


CENTRAL EL PASO
MEXICO
Rio Grande
Civic Center
W. Paisano Dr.
W. San Antonio
E. Paisano Dr.
Wyoming
Missouri
E. Franklin
E. Mills
Texas Ave.
Ave.
San Antonio
Overland
Cotton
Stanton
E. 6th Ave.
S. El Paso Rd.
Santa Fe St.
Border Highway
0 1/4 mi
0 0.25 km
80
85
10
54
Dyer
Railroad Dr.
Hondo Pass
BIGGS ARMY BASE
Transmountain Rd.
375
Fred Wilson
Forrest Rd.
El Paso International Airport
Airway
To Carlsbad Caverns & Hueco Tanks State Park
62
180
Montana
Macgruder
Edgemere
Yarbrough
Lee Trevino
George Dieter
Pebble Hills
Montwood
Lomaland
Trawood
Vista Del Sol
Zaragoza
Delta
Trowbridge
Alameda
Border Hwy
Rio Bravo del Norte
Rio Grande
Pan-American Highway
Carr. Ponenir
UNITED STATES
MEXICO
North Loop
Joe Battle
Americas Avenue
Horizon Blvd.
0 2 mi
0 2 km
TEXAS
El Paso
Dallas
Austin
San Antonio
Houston
Corpus Christi

campus and downtown. Buses run from about 5am to 9pm on weekdays, with shorter hours on weekends and holidays; the fare is $1.25 for adults; 75¢ for children, students, and those with disabilities; and 30¢ for seniors.

**BY TAXI** Both **Yellow Cab** (✆ **915/533-3433**) and **Sun City Cab** (✆ **915/544-2211**) offer 24-hour service in El Paso and the surrounding area.

**BY FOOT** Downtown El Paso is well suited for a walking tour, and it is popular to park downtown and walk across the Santa Fe Bridge into Ciudad Juárez. ***Note:*** Be sure to carry your passport with you if you cross the border. While photo ID has been traditionally sufficient for reentry into the United States, all land crossings into Mexico now require a passport upon your return into the United States.

## Visitor Information

The **El Paso Convention & Visitors Bureau** is located at One Civic Center Plaza, next to the El Paso Convention and Performing Arts Center (✆ **800/351-6024** or 915/534-0601; www.visitelpaso.com), and also operates information centers at the airport and Fort Bliss. *El Paso: The Official Visitor's Guide* is a good publication to request before your trip.

There is also a **Texas Travel Information Center,** with an excellent selection of brochures, maps, and other visitor resources located 20 miles northwest of El Paso in Anthony (I-10, exit 0), at the Texas–New Mexico border.

For information on Ciudad Juárez, contact **OCV Ciudad Juárez,** Av. de las Americas #2551, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico (✆ **888/654-0394;** www.visitajuarez.com).



### *Fast Facts* El Paso

***American Express*** **Sun Travel American Express,** 3100 N. Mesa St., Ste. B (✆ **915/532-8900;** www.suntvl.com), offers American Express services Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 6pm and Saturday from 9am to 2pm.

***Babysitters*** Front desks at major hotels often can make arrangements on your behalf.

***Dentists*** Contact **1-800-DENTIST** (✆ **800/336-8478**).

***Doctors*** Call **El Paso County Medical Society** (✆ **915/533-0981**).

***Drugstores*** **Walgreens Drug Stores** has a 24-hour prescription service at 1831 N. Lee Trevino Dr. (✆ **915/594-1129**).

***Emergencies*** For police, fire, and medical emergencies, call ✆ **911.** To reach the **Poison Center,** dial ✆ **800/764-7661** or 915/544-1200.

***Hospitals*** Full-service hospitals, with 24-hour emergency rooms, include **Sierra Medical Center,** 1625 Medical Center Dr. (✆ **915/747-4000;** www.sphn.com), just northwest of downtown, and **Del Sol Medical Center,** 10301 Gateway W. (✆ **915/595-9000;** www.delsolhealth.com), on the east side of the city.

***Newspapers & Magazines*** The *El Paso Times* (www.elpasotimes.com) is the city's only daily English-language newspaper, and an El Paso edition of *El Diario de Juárez* (www.diario.com.mx) is published in Spanish daily. *El Paso Scene* (www.epscene.com) is the city's free monthly arts-and-entertainment paper. *El Paso Magazine* (www.epmediagroup.com) is a monthly magazine focusing on arts, culture, and regional issues.

***Post Office*** The main post office, located downtown at 219 E. Mills Ave., is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm, Saturday from 8:30am to noon.

***Safety*** While El Paso has among the lowest crime rates of any major U.S. city, it is far from crime free, and drugs and auto theft are two preeminent problems. It's important to keep aware of your surroundings at all times and ask at your hotel or a visitor center about the safety of a given neighborhood, especially after dark. ***Note:*** When visiting Mexico, it is important to remember that Ciudad Juárez is one of the world's most active drug-smuggling centers, and recently it has been especially bad for drug-related violence. However, crime against tourists has remained rare.

***Taxes*** In the city of El Paso, the total sales tax is 8.25% and 15.5% for lodging.

***Time Zone*** El Paso is in the Mountain Standard Time zone, like nearby New Mexico but unlike the rest of Texas, which is in the Central Standard Time zone. Set your clock back 1 hour if you enter El Paso from the east.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### The Top Attractions

**Chamizal National Memorial ★** When the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, the two countries agreed on a border: the center of the deepest channel of the Rio Grande. However, as historian Leon C. Metz once wrote, "Rivers are never *absolutely* permanent. They evaporate, flood, change channels, shrink, expand, and even disappear. Rivers are, by nature, capricious." After the war, the Rio Grande gradually shifted southward, resulting in a diplomatic stalemate between Mexico and the United States over the boundary's location. This impasse lasted until 1964, finally ending when presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Adolfo López Mateos signed the Chamizal Treaty. Parcels of land were exchanged, residents and businesses were uprooted, and a permanent, concrete channel was constructed to signify a more predictable boundary.

Commemorating the dispute's peaceful resolution, the 55-acre park at the Chamizal National Memorial commemorates the dispute's settlement with a bevy of facilities: 2 miles of foot trails, an outdoor amphitheater and indoor theater that host many free concerts and other events, and a visitor center with a museum, three galleries, and a bookstore (expect to spend an hour touring the museum and galleries). It's a nice open space that's more accessible and greener than the Franklin Mountains and larger than the other municipal parks. There is also a walkway to the adjacent Bridge of the Americas leading to the memorial's Mexican counterpart, **Parque Chamizal,** with an anthropology museum and an amusement park in Ciudad Juárez.

800 S. San Marcial Dr., at Paisano Dr. and U.S. 54 (Patriot Fwy.). ✆ **915/532-7273.** www.nps.gov/cham. Free admission, with fees for some events in the amphitheater. Park daily 5am–10pm. Visitor center Tues–Sat 10am–5pm.

**El Paso Mission Trail ★** First established in the 17th and 18th centuries, three historic Spanish missions provide a link to El Paso's colonial past. All three are among the oldest continually active missions in the country, and warrant a visit for their architectural and historic merit. But if you have time to hit only one, drive out to San Elceario; unlike Ysleta and Socorro, it's removed from the modern urban development and still feels like it's from a different era and culture.

From I-10, exit Zaragosa Road (exit 32) and head south 3 miles to **Mission Ysleta,** 9501 Socorro Rd. at Zaragosa Road (✆ **915/859-9848;** www.ysletamission.org), established in 1682 in what was then Mexico. The silver-domed chapel here was built in 1851 after floods shifted the Rio Grande and washed away all of the previous structure, save the foundation.

Heading southeast on Socorro Road for 3 miles takes you to **Mission Socorro** (✆ **915/859-7718**), established in 1682, 1 day after Mission Ysleta. The original adobe chapel (1692) was washed away by a flood in the 1740s, rebuilt, destroyed again in 1829, and finally replaced in 1843 by the current restored structure.

The most impressive of the three, **Presidio Chapel San Elceario** (✆ **915/851-2333**) was established at its present location in 1789 as a Spanish military outpost 6 miles south of Mission Socorro on Socorro Road. Parishioners built the present-day church in 1877 as the centerpiece of the village plaza, which retains its historical charm to this day. This structure is the largest of the three missions, and an excellent example of the merging of American Indian and Spanish architectural styles with majestic arches and a pressed-tin ceiling. The surrounding village has been gaining fame in recent years as the site of "The First Thanksgiving," said to have taken place in 1598, 23 years before the Plymouth Thanksgiving.

Visitors are welcome to tour the missions on their own; expect to spend at least 3 hours if you visit all three.

An 8-mile stretch of Zaragosa and Socorro roads, southeast of downtown El Paso via I-10. ✆ **915/534-0630.** Free admission.



**El Paso Museum of Art ★★** Once regarded as lacking a regional focus, the El Paso Museum of Art has recently turned that criticism on its head: The stunning landscapes and personal portraits on display here evoke the region's look, and more important, its feel. Of the five permanent galleries, three are dedicated to the cultures that have commingled in El Paso for the past 400 years: One is dedicated to Mexican art of the 17th to 19th centuries, one to European art from the 13th to 18th centuries, and one to American works dating from 1800 to the mid-1900s. Seasonal exhibits often feature edgier contemporary works. A hidden treasure, the museum begs for an unhurried hour of your time.

1 Arts Festival Plaza. ✆ **915/532-1707.** www.elpasoartmuseum.org. Free admission; fees charged for special exhibits (usually around $5). Tues–Sat 9am–5pm (until 9pm Thurs); Sun noon–5pm.

## More Attractions

Oenophiles will want to take a side trip to **Zin Valle Vineyards,** 7315 Hwy. 28, Canutillo (✆ **915/877-4544;** www.zinvalle.com), where the tasting room is open from noon to 5pm Friday to Monday and by appointment at other times. In town in the Kern Place neighborhood, **Star Canyon Winery,** 2601 N. Stanton St. (✆ **915/544-7000;** www.starcanyonwinery.com), has a tasting room that's open Tuesday to Thursday from 1 to 7pm and Friday and Saturday from 1 to 8pm.

**Ascarate Lake City Park** Centered on a 44-acre artificial lake, this municipal park consists of 400 acres of undeveloped terrain crisscrossed by trails. While swimming in the lake is prohibited, recreational opportunities include fishing (the lake is stocked with channel catfish and rainbow trout) and golfing at the park's 27-hole golf course. There's also an aquatics center with an indoor Olympic-size pool and ball fields.

6900 Delta Dr., btw. Alameda Ave. and Border Hwy. ✆ **915/772-3941.** Free admission to park, although some attractions have fees, including the golf course and Western Playland Amusement Park. Daily dawn–dusk.

**Concordia Cemetery** El Paso's "Boot Hill," Concordia is the final resting place of numerous infamous outlaws who met their maker in the city's wilder days. The gravestones here, which mostly date to the second half of the 19th century, remain haunting reminders of El Paso's storied past. Near the northern gate, the most notable grave is that of notorious John Wesley Hardin, known as "The Fastest Gun in the West." After his 1895 assassination in downtown El Paso, Hardin was put to rest here alongside other gunslingers (including Hardin's killer) and a generation of law-abiding citizens. Hardin's grave is said to be El Paso's most-visited attraction.

Copia St. and I-10. ✆ **915/562-7062.** Free admission. Daily during daylight hours. Immediately north of I-10 via Copia St. (exit 22A).

**El Paso Museum of History ★** Opening in 2007, the new El Paso Museum of History is worthy of its subject, a major improvement on its shuttered predecessor on the city's east side. Of the four galleries, two feature permanent exhibits: Downstairs is "El Paso: A to Z," a fun look at alphabetical chapters in the city's history, including floods, alligators, and baseball, and upstairs is "The Changing Pass," covering the area's evolution from the Ice Age to modern day. The remaining two galleries feature regularly rotating exhibits on topics of all kinds. Allow 1 hour.

510 N. Santa Fe St. ✆ **915/351-3588.** www.elpasotexas.gov/history. Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed Mon and city holidays.

**El Paso Zoo ★** Kids Home to some 1,700 animals from 240 different species in natural habitat exhibits, the El Paso Zoo is one of the state's best. The focus is on American and Asian wildlife, with a monkey island, reptile house, Asian Grasslands exhibit, and Americas Aviary. Among the crowd favorites are sun bears, black jaguars, tigers, and Asian elephants. There is also a restaurant, a gift shop, and a replica of a "Paraje," the 16th-century equivalent of a rest stop on the Camino Real. Allow at least 1 hour.

4001 E. Paisano Dr. (across from the El Paso County Coliseum). ✆ **915/521-1850.** www.elpasozoo.org. Admission $5 adults, $4 seniors 62 and older, $3 children 3–12, free for children 2 and under. Mon–Fri 9:30am–4pm year-round; Sat–Sun 9:30am–4pm winter, 9:30am–5pm summer. Closed Thanksgiving, Dec 25, and Jan 1.

**Magoffin Home State Historic Site** Built in 1875 for Joseph Magoffin, a pioneer leader who helped guide the city through its chaotic Wild West days, this is El Paso's only historic house museum open to the public. A recommended hour-long tour for the history buff, the house is a prime example of Territorial architecture, with an adobe structure and Greek revival accents. Many original furnishings are still in place: The Victorian parlor is unique due to its Mexican accents, the oldest part of the home still sports a viga ceiling (thatched and exposed), and one bedroom is outfitted with a 13-foot half-canopy bed from New Orleans.

1120 Magoffin Ave. ✆ **915/533-5147.** Admission $3 adults, free for children 12 and under. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm; tours given on the hour 9am–4pm.

**National Border Patrol Museum** The only museum dedicated to the U.S. Border Patrol, this facility does a good job presenting displays on all aspects of the federal agency, founded in El Paso in 1924. Allow about a half-hour to peruse such highlights as the Lady Liberty exhibit, a Statue of Liberty replica and text and diaries about the immigrant experience; and two former Border Patrol aircraft: a Piper Super Cub plane and a Hughes OH-6A helicopter. There are also exhibits on Border Patrol dogs, electronics, and ground vehicles.

4315 Transmountain Dr. ✆ **915/759-6060.** www.borderpatrolmuseum.com. Free admission (donations accepted). Tues–Sat 9am–5pm. Closed major holidays.

## Especially for Kids

**Insights Science Museum ★ Kids** This downtown museum is a winner for young minds curious about the inner workings of nature. There are interactive exhibits on topics ranging from energy and optics to health and biology. Kids get a big jolt of fun out of the Tesla coil that courses with 500,000 volts several times a day. Another favorite is the exhibit on sound, with an Echo Tube and displays on sonic waves. A comprehensive tour requires about an hour.

505 N. Santa Fe St. ✆ **915/534-0000.** www.insightselpaso.org. Admission $6 adults; $5 students, seniors, and military; $4 children 4–11; free for children 3 and under. Tues–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed Mon.

**Western Playland Amusement Park Kids** In 2006, the longtime local amusement park relocated to Sunland Park, New Mexico (about 8 miles northwest of El Paso), taking with it the El Bandito roller coaster and opening several new thrill rides. Concession stands and picnic areas fill the needs of the hungry and thirsty.

1249 Futurity Dr., across from Sunland Park Race Track and Casino. ✆ **915/772-3914.** www.westernplayland.com. Admission $16 for a pass for unlimited rides. Open Feb–Oct; call for hours, which vary throughout the season.

## Organized Tours

The **El Paso–Juárez Trolley Company** ★ (✆ **915/544-0062**) offers trolley tours that venture into Mexico, New Mexico, and historic El Paso for $10 to $20, depending on the package. Juárez tours depart from One Civic Center Plaza from 10am to 4pm year-round, but they require a minimum of 10 passengers and many trolleys get canceled. Call for information on other tours. **Si! El Paso Tours** (✆ **800/658-6742** or 915/541-1308; www.sielpasotours.com/index.html) offers tours and transportation on both sides of the border. The **El Paso CVB** (✆ **915/534-0600;** www.visitelpaso.com) can provide travelers with informative brochures that detail self-guided historic walking tours of both El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.



## Outdoor Activities

At nearly 24,300 acres, **Franklin Mountains State Park** is the largest urban wilderness park in the United States and a favorite destination of El Pasoans looking to hike, bike, or climb. Rugged and speckled by cactuses and ocotillos, the mountains are populated by small mammals, birds, reptiles, deer, and the occasional mountain lion. At 7,192 feet, the summit of North Franklin Mountain is about 3,000 feet higher than the city below.

The mountains, the final southern ridge of the geological phenomenon that created the Rockies, are home to about 40 miles of developed hiking and mountain biking trails; floods in 2006 washed many trails out, so call for current information. The hikes are primarily moderate to difficult; try the 1.2-mile round-trip to the Aztec Caves or the more difficult 9.2-mile round-trip to the peak of North Franklin Mountain.

If you don't want to break a sweat, take the **Wyler Aerial Tramway** (✆ **915/566-6622**) to the summit of Ranger Peak ($7 adults, $4 children 12 and under). Beyond the trails and the tram, the park is also a renowned rock-climbing spot and home to an outdoor amphitheater (see "The Performing Arts," p. 362).

It takes about 20 minutes to reach the park by car from downtown El Paso. There are numerous primitive campsites, but no water or electricity in the park. Fees are $4 for day use (free to children 12 and under) and $8 for camping, and the park is open from 8am to 5pm year-round (campers receive a combination to the gate so they can come and go after

day-use hours). For more information, contact Franklin Mountains State Park, 1331 McKelligon Canyon Rd., El Paso, TX 79930 (✆ **915/566-6441;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

**Hueco Tanks State Historic Site,** located 30 miles northeast of El Paso via U.S. 62/180 and Ranch Road 2775, is another popular rock-climbing destination. It is a world-class bouldering site, among the best on the planet. Centered on three small, rocky outcroppings that loom above the surrounding desert, the park gets its name from the *huecos* (depressions) that catch rainwater and attract life. Many of the rocks are marked by lively pictographs, the work of native tribes over the past 10,000 years. Tours of these fragile sites are offered Wednesday through Saturday at 9am and 11am in the summer and 10:30am and 2pm in the winter; reservations are recommended. Birding, bouldering, and biking tours are also available.

Other than climbing, hiking and camping are popular activities at the park. There are 6.5 miles of trails and a campground with 20 back-in sites (3 with water only, 17 with water and electricity) and showers. Campsite availability is dependent on volunteers; call ahead to see if the campground is open. The park charges $4 for day use and $12 to $16 for campsites. Bikes are not permitted. For more information, contact Hueco Tanks State Historic Site, 6900 Hueco Tanks Rd. #1, El Paso, TX 79938 (✆ **915/857-1135;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

**GOLF** The 27-hole **Painted Dunes Desert Golf Course,** located 9 miles northeast of I-10 via U.S. 54 at 12000 McCombs St. (✆ **915/821-2122;** www.painteddunes.com), is one of the top municipal courses in the entire country. Nonresident greens fees range from $37 to $45 with cart or $25 to $33 without. Twilight rates are also available. Lee Trevino began his illustrious professional golf career at **Emerald Springs Golf and Conference Center,** 20 miles east of town at 16000 Ashford St. (✆ **915/852-9110;** www.emeraldspringsgolf.com). Greens fees are $29 to $34, cart included. Other options include **Ascarate Golf Course** in Ascarate Lake City Park (✆ **915/772-7381**), with greens fees of $13 (carts: $12), and **Cielo Vista Golf Course,** 1510 Hawkins Blvd. (✆ **915/591-4927**), with greens fees of $26 to $34 with a cart.

**HIKING** The top hiking areas in and around El Paso are at **Franklin Mountains State Park** and **Hueco Tanks State Historic Site** (see above).

**MOUNTAIN BIKING** **Franklin Mountains State Park** (see above) is by far the most popular mountain biking destination in the El Paso area. There are about 40 miles of bike-accessible trails.

## Spectator Sports

**BASEBALL** The **El Paso Diablos,** an independent team in the Central League, play a May-to-August schedule at 10,000-seat Cohen Stadium, 9700 Gateway Blvd. N. Single-game tickets are $6 to $7. Call ✆ **915/755-2000** or visit www.diablos.com for schedules.

**BASKETBALL** The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) fields a Conference USA team, the **Miners,** that plays from December to March at the Don Haskins Center, 2801 N. Mesa St. Tickets range from $6 to $50 for single games. Call ✆ **915/747-5234** or visit www.utepathletics.com to purchase tickets or for more information.

**FOOTBALL** The **UTEP Miners** football squad plays a Conference USA schedule from September to December on campus at the Sun Bowl. Single-game tickets are $20 to $40. Also, the stadium hosts the second-oldest New Year's bowl game in the nation. Call ✆ **915/747-5234** or visit www.utepathletics.com for schedules or to purchase tickets.

**HORSE RACING** There is live horse racing just outside of western El Paso (actually in New Mexico) at **Sunland Park Racetrack and Casino,** 1200 Futurity Dr. (✆ **575/874-5200;** www.sunland-park.com). The racing season runs from December to April (simulcast racing from around the country is featured year-round). There are also restaurants, lounges, and a casino on-site.

**RODEO** The **Southwestern International PRCA Rodeo** is held every September at Cohen Stadium, 9700 Gateway N. Call ✆ **915/755-2000** or visit www.elprodeo.com for schedules and ticket information.

## Shopping

El Paso's main shopping district is downtown—targeting both Mexican and American shoppers—and there are several enclosed malls scattered around the city. The area is known for Western wear, Southwestern art, and Mexican imports.

The three-story **Galeria San Ysidro,** 801 Texas Ave. (✆ **915/544-4444**), is more than just an antiques store, housing an impressive selection of art, furniture, and decor from all over the world. **Cowtown Boots,** 11451 Gateway W. (✆ **915/593-2929;** www.cowtownboots.com), claims to be the world's largest Western wear store, with 40,000 square feet of boots (alligator to ostrich), jeans, clothing, and accessories. If you want some custom boots that are leather works of art, make an appointment at **Rocketbuster Boots,** 115 S. Anthony St. (✆ **915/541-1300;** www.rocketbuster.com), but you'll need at least $750 for a pair. For tongue-searing delicacies, I love the **El Paso Chile Company,** 909 Texas Ave. (✆ **888/4-SALSAS** [472-5727] or 915/544-3434; www.elpasochile.com), for its sauces (with such fiery names as "Hellfire & Damnation") and all things spicy.

Shopping centers include **Sunland Park Mall,** 750 Sunland Park Dr. (✆ **915/833-5595**), and **Cielo Vista Mall,** 8401 Gateway W. (✆ **915/779-7070**). Located where Pancho Villa and General Pershing once negotiated, **Placita Santa Fe,** 5034 Doniphan Rd., features 20 quaint shops, specializing in art, designer clothing, antiques, and jewelry.



# WHERE TO STAY

You'll find numerous hotels and motels in El Paso, but little in the way of B&Bs and resorts. Most of the accommodations are chain franchises, with a few exceptions, located either near the airport or adjacent to I-10. The city's room taxes add about 15.5% to lodging bills.

In addition to the properties described below, there are numerous hotels and motels located off I-10 near El Paso International Airport, including **Best Western Airport Inn,** 7144 Gateway E. (✆ **800/528-1234** or 915/779-7700), with a double rate of $65 to $75, and **Comfort Inn,** 900 Yarbrough Dr. (✆ **800/228-5150** or 915/594-9111), with a double rate of $84 to $89. Downtown, the **Holiday Inn Express** at 409 E. Missouri Ave. (✆ **888/465-4329** or 915/544-3333) offers doubles for $69 to $109. In the Sunland Park area, the pick of the litter is the **Holiday Inn Sunland Park,** 900 Sunland Park Dr. (✆ **800/658-2744** or 915/833-2900), with a double rate of $99 to $169.

## Expensive

**Camino Real Hotel ★★** El Paso's finest hotel—and one of a handful downtown—is the only Camino Real hotel or resort outside of Mexico. However, it's just 6 blocks north of the border, adjacent to the El Paso Convention and Performing Arts Center and within easy walking distance of all of the downtown attractions. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the hotel effortlessly meshes El Paso's past and present.

Formerly known as the Hotel Paso del Norte, the property first opened in 1912, awing guests with its lavish marble and cherrywood lobby under a stunning glass dome from Tiffany's in New York. While the dome remains in place above a splendid bar and fine-dining restaurant, almost everything else has changed as a result of numerous renovations. In 1986, a modern 17-story tower was built next to the old Paso del Norte, expanding the lobby and more than doubling the hotel's capacity.

Tastefully decorated with reproductions and contemporary furnishings, the oversize rooms have two doubles, two queen-size, or one king-size bed, the decor punctuates great downtown views. Elegant suites have Victorian and Southwestern motifs.

101 S. El Paso St., El Paso, TX 79901. ✆ **800/769-4300** or 915/534-3000. Fax 915/534-3024. www.caminoreal.com. 359 units. $99–$160 double; $170–$1,000 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Underground parking $5 daily. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; bar; outdoor heated pool; exercise room; sauna; courtesy car; business center; 24-hr. room service. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Marriott El Paso ★** Nicely renovated in 2008, this modern chain property is a solid lodging option for those flying in or out of El Paso. The stylish lobby is centered about a large comfortable seating area, and the thick-walled rooms are colorful, comfortable, and contemporary, featuring flatscreen TV, black-and-white desert photos, and nifty LED reading lights. There is also a great pool courtyard, with several rooms opening onto it. There is a locally popular sports bar, **Pitchers,** as well as the **Red Rim Bistro,** serving three meals daily. While the hotel is aimed at the business traveler, it more than fills the needs of tourists and is a bargain on the weekend.

1600 Airway Blvd. (1/4 mile south of El Paso International Airport), El Paso, TX 79925. ✆ **800/228-9290** or 915/779-3300. Fax 915/779-4591. www.marriott.com. 296 units. $123–$199 double ($79–$89 on weekends); $399 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 pools (1 indoor, 1 outdoor); exercise room; spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; business center; complimentary Wi-Fi in lobby and concierge-level lounge; limited room service; coin-op washers and dryers; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, Wi-Fi ($10/day), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## Moderate

**Travelodge Hotel—La Hacienda Airport ★** Value Kids Some roadside motels surprise you with their attention to detail—this is definitely one of them. Situated northeast of downtown off busy Montana Avenue, the grounds here are a world apart, centered on a shady courtyard surrounding a seasonal swimming pool. The rooms are housed in 10 different brick buildings, with exterior entry through hand-painted wooden doors. Some of the accommodations in the older buildings are on the small side, albeit well maintained and comfortable, while the larger rooms in the newer structures are a notch above the norm, with blue-and-white decor and exposed wooden-beamed ceilings. I like the eight Jacuzzi rooms, featuring a picture window that separates the tub from the bedroom, and the family suites, amusingly decorated with plenty of room.

6400 Montana Ave., El Paso, TX 79925. ✆ **800/772-4231** or 915/772-4231. Fax 915/779-2918. www.the.travelodge.com/elpaso05473. 91 units. $49–$75 double; $85 suite; $95 Jacuzzi room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Pets accepted with $10 per night fee. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; business center; limited room service; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, complimentary Wi-Fi, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## Inexpensive

**Gardner Hotel/El Paso International Youth Hostel** Value A downtown mainstay since 1922, the Gardner Hotel has a storied history—infamous gangster John Dillinger stayed here in the 1930s while on the run. The public areas are well kept,

 especially the attractive lobby, which has been restored to its original condition with a marble staircase, mauve carpeting, and historical photographs. There are two shared hostel rooms—one for males and one for females—each with two bunk beds and desks. There is also a wide range of private accommodations—some with no frills, some with the original antique furnishings. Hostel guests share bathrooms and an equipped kitchen, and also have access to a television, a pool table, and a pay Internet kiosk. The private rooms have TVs, phones, and private bathrooms. A restaurant, **Pot-au-Fau,** opened in 2009.

311 E. Franklin St., El Paso, TX 79901. ✆ **915/532-3661.** www.gardnerhotel.com. 50 units. $21–$23 dormitory bunk; $32–$70 private rooms. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (world cuisine); bar; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, complimentary Wi-Fi.

### Camping

Several primitive campsites are available at Franklin Mountains State Park, and there are also some tent and RV sites at Hueco Tanks State Historic Site; see "Outdoor Activities," above.

**El Paso–West RV Park** Located just west of the Texas–New Mexico state line, this clean campground is nicely treed (for the desert, that is), with laundry facilities, free Wi-Fi, handicap-accessible showers, and a small store with groceries and RV supplies. An 18-hole golf course is located right across the street.

1415 Anthony Dr., Anthony, NM 88021. ✆ **800/754-1543** for reservations or 575/882-7172. 100 sites with full hookups, including 70 pull-throughs. $24 nightly. MC, V. 10 miles west of El Paso city limits (I-10, exit 162 in New Mexico).



## WHERE TO DINE

W. Park Kerr, founder of the **El Paso Chile Company** (see "Shopping," above) and self-described "ultimate El Paso food insider," labels El Paso's local culinary tradition as "border regional cuisine." It isn't quite Tex-Mex, nor is it authentic Mexican; it has notes of New Mexican and loads of first-rate chile. There are many great hole-in-the-wall eateries in El Paso. Among the recommended restaurants are **Kiki's,** 2719 N. Piedras St. (✆ **915/565-6713**); **Jalisco Café,** 1029 E. 7th Ave. (✆ **915/532-7174**); **Mexican Cottage,** 904 Texas Ave. (✆ **915/546-9816**); and **Lucky Cafe,** 3831 Alameda Ave. (✆ **915/532-2834**). ***Note:*** Smoking is not allowed in El Paso's restaurants.

### Expensive

**Café Central ★★** CONTEMPORARY ECLECTIC Worth the splurge, Café Central is an anomaly in a town dominated by Tex-Mex—a sleek urban bistro serving sophisticated international cuisine. There are three seating areas: a gracious dining room, a sleek lounge, and a breezy patio out front. The menu changes daily, but always offers a wide range of standout fare (most notably the creative Southwestern interpretations of traditional Continental dishes). On a given night, you might start with Dos Equis–steamed clams with tomatoes, garlic, jalapeños, and cilantro; follow with a cup of cream of green-chile soup; and then enjoy a tantalizing main course of sautéed calamari and shellfish on a capellini bed, a grilled white veal chop with a revelation of a side dish in the green-chile risotto, or possibly luscious guyamas shrimp with a zesty tequila-cilantro sauce. The award-winning wine list is one of the city's best, with more than 300 bottles, and the desserts include the best *leches* (Mexican milk cakes) in all of Texas.

109 N. Oregon St., in the lobby of the Texas Tower (One Texas Court). ✆ **915/545-2233.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $7–$28 lunch, $13–$35 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Closed Sun and major holidays.

**Tips A Note About Safety**

Although most visitors to Juárez have an enjoyable time without incident, the city sees its fair share of drug trafficking, pickpocketing, and violence. Tourists have not been targeted by a recent surge of violence, but have been victims of theft and carjacking. It is especially important to remain aware of your surroundings when visiting the city, and I recommend you do not travel across the border alone.

## Moderate/Inexpensive

The local microbrewery, **Jaxon's,** has four locations: 1135 Airway Blvd. (✆ **915/778-9696**), 4799 N. Mesa St. (✆ **915/544-1188**), 7410 Remcon Circle (✆ **915/845-6557**), and 12111 Montwood Dr. (✆ **915/857-6677**). For coffee or a plump sandwich, hit the Seattle-themed **Pike Street Market,** 207 Mills St. (✆ **915/545-1010**), a downtown hangout popular with suits and slackers alike.

**H&H Car Wash and Coffee Shop** ★ Finds BORDER REGIONAL/COFFEE SHOP A dinky coffee shop straight out of the 1960s, the H&H is a bit weathered, noisy, and not much to look at. It doesn't matter—the place is home to some of the best inexpensive Tex-Mex in town. It's packed with locals from open to close, scarfing down such specialties as *carne picada* (diced sirloin with jalapeños, tomatoes, and onions), huevos rancheros, and chiles rellenos. Proprietor Kenneth Haddad does one heckuva job, using only the freshest ingredients and sticking with tradition. For hungry road-trippers with dirty cars and tight budgets, you can't get any more convenient than the H&H: Gas up, get your car washed, and have a bite to eat, all in one fell swoop. The car wash operates from 9am to 5pm during the week and from 9am to 3pm on Saturdays, charging $12 to $25 for a complete hand cleaning, inside and out.

701 E. Yandell Dr. at Ochoa St. ✆ **915/533-1144.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $5–$8. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7:30am–3pm. North of I-10, exit 20 at Cotton St.

**L&J Café** ★★ BORDER REGIONAL Nicknamed "The Old Place by the Graveyard" because of its proximity to the Concordia Cemetery (p. 355), the L&J is an El Paso landmark. Owned and operated by the Duran family since it first opened in 1927, the L&J served as a casino and speak-easy during Prohibition and packs them in today for transcendental "border regional cuisine." I'm hooked on the chicken enchiladas, which approach perfection, but the huevos, chile con queso, and *caldillo* (beef and potato stew with a green chile and garlic kick) are as good as you'll find anywhere. There are also healthy versions of many entrees, prepared with less cheese, and tortillas that aren't fried. It doesn't hurt that the salsa is spicy, the beer is cold, and the service is quick and friendly, even when the place is filled to capacity—as it is most of the time.

3622 E. Missouri Ave. ✆ **915/566-8418.** Reservations accepted for large parties only. Main courses $6–$15. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Wed 10am–8pm; Thurs–Fri 10am–9pm; Sat 9am–6pm (bar open later). Just north of I-10, exit 22A at Copia St.

**Rib Hut** BARBECUE A favorite hangout for students from the nearby University of Texas at El Paso, the Rib Hut bustles day and night. You can't miss this A-shaped roof on North Mesa, and you can't beat the place's daily specials—especially the $1.75 rib nights on Mondays and Wednesdays. The menu includes sandwiches, combo plates, and other

 platters, primarily barbecue beef, pork, and chicken, but also fried catfish and steak. Beer is available, including—of course—cold Shiner Bock.

2612 N. Mesa St. ✆ **915/532-7427.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $7–$15. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm; Sun noon–8pm.

## EL PASO AFTER DARK

El Paso's entertainment scene is spread throughout the city, and remarkably diverse. The El Paso Performing Arts Center, the beautifully restored Plaza Theatre, the McKelligon Canyon Amphitheatre, the outdoor and indoor stages at Chamizal National Memorial, and the facilities at the University of Texas at El Paso all host regular performances. Fans of rock, country, Tejano, and jazz will likely find what they're looking for at the city's bars and clubs. The UTEP college scene is centered on Mesa and Cincinnati streets.

The free, monthly *El Paso Scene* and its online counterpart, **www.epscene.com**, are the best places to start for exploring arts-and-entertainment opportunities. The Friday *El Paso Times* (www.elpasotimes.com) also features performance listings, as does *The Prospector,* UTEP's student newspaper. Tickets for many events are available through **Ticketmaster** (✆ **915/544-8444;** www.ticketmaster.com).

### The Performing Arts

**El Paso Opera,** 310 N. Mesa St., Ste. 601 (✆ **915/581-5534;** www.epopera.org), produces spring and fall shows annually, with a Thursday and Saturday performance of each held at the Plaza Theatre downtown. Spanish and English subtitles are projected for every performance. Tickets run $15 to $90 for a single event. **El Paso Pro-Musica,** 6557 N. Mesa St. (✆ **915/833-9400;** www.elpasopromusica.org), presents several concerts a year, including the El Paso Chamber Music Festival every January. Concerts are held at numerous locations with ticket prices of $5 to $25. **El Paso Symphony Orchestra,** 1 Civic Center Plaza (✆ **915/532-3776;** www.epso.org), puts on about a dozen different concerts annually. Tickets for single performances run between $10 and $40, with discounts for children and seniors. At Franklin Mountains State Park, the outdoor **McKelligon Canyon Amphitheatre,** 2 McKelligon Canyon Rd. (✆ **915/565-6900**), annually hosts **Viva! El Paso** (✆ **915/588-7054;** www.viva-ep.org) from mid-June to early August. Tickets are $10 and $24; barbecue-style dinners are available.

The **El Paso Playhouse,** 2501 Montana Ave. (✆ **915/532-1317;** www.elpasoplayhouse.org), stages a new production almost every month. There's also a children's company, Kids-N-Co., which produces timeless fairy tales and other light fare. Tickets are usually less than $10. The **University of Texas at El Paso Dinner Theatre,** Union Ballroom on the UTEP campus (✆ **915/747-6060** or 747-5234; www.utep.edu/udt), is a tradition, producing student musicals since 1983. Today, the theater presents plays Wednesday through Sunday at 7pm during the school year. Dinner might include prime rib, baked potato, and a cookie sundae. Recent productions have included *The Full Monty, The Rocky Horror Show,* and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.* Tickets run $35 to $40, except for Sunday matinees (2:30pm), which are about $20 but don't include dinner.

### The Club & Live Music Scene

**Blu,** 209 S. El Paso St. (✆ **915/351-8258**), is a downtown dancing hot spot featuring both DJs and local and national musical acts. **Stampede,** 5500 Doniphan Rd. (✆ **915/833-6397**), is an El Paso country-and-western institution that features recorded and live music. **Club 101,** 3233 N. Mesa St. (✆ **915/544-2101;** www.club101.com), is a live music venue featuring touring rock and pop acts.

## The Bar Scene

Downtown, the **Tap,** 408 E. San Antonio St. (✆ **915/532-1848**), is a classic watering hole, serving plenty of cold beer and spicy Mexican dishes. Offering cayenne-spiced Cajun dishes and daily beer specials, **Crawdaddy's,** 212 Cincinnati St. (✆ **915/533-9332**), is a cozy-but-rowdy haunt favored by the UTEP crowd. It's located amid a strip of bars and restaurants on Cincinnati Street, one of the city's livelier blocks at midnight. One of the most regal places in the Southwest to sip a cocktail, **Dome Bar,** 101 S. El Paso St. in the Camino Real Hotel (✆ **915/534-3000**), is light-years beyond a typical hotel bar. **Rosa's Cantina,** 3454 Doniphan Dr. (✆ **915/833-0402**), was made famous by country legend Marty Robbins in his 1959 hit "El Paso"—or perhaps merely inspired by it after the fact.

# A SIDE TRIP TO CIUDAD JUAREZ

El Paso's sister city, Ciudad Juárez, is the fourth-largest city in Mexico with approximately three million residents. Together, the cities form the largest binational population in the world. Juárez is a regional manufacturing center, due to cheap, abundant labor, and companies such as General Motors and Sony have facilities in the city. Juárez is seedy in the same way as other border cities such as Nogales and Tijuana are, but it is more of a real Mexican city, not one that is built on tourism alone. Juárez's history and authenticity, in my opinion, make it an interesting stop for an afternoon, or even an entire day. (If you're headed specifically to Marfa or Big Bend, however, it probably isn't worth the diversion.)

Like El Paso, Juárez's modern history begins with Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate crossing the Rio Grande in 1581. The oldest structure on the border, **La Misíon de Nuestra Señora Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission),** was completed in 1668 and remains in remarkably good condition today. The city played important roles in the Mexican-American War and the Mexican Revolution, and was once frequented by Pancho Villa.

Today, the city's booming manufacturing industry is complemented by tourism, with many visitors crossing the border to take in the colorful outdoor markets, historic missions, and lively nightlife. Tourists often drive across the five bridges scattered around El Paso, park in downtown El Paso and walk across, or else take a taxi or a trolley tour. The bridges, aside from the "Free Bridge" (or Cordova Bridge) south of I-10 via U.S. 54, all charge nominal tolls, even to pedestrians, of 25¢ to $2. The most convenient points of entry are the two downtown bridges, at Stanton Street and Santa Fe Street. U.S. currency is welcome practically everywhere in Juárez.

## Essentials

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Contact **Fiprotur Chihuahua,** Av. de las Americas No. 2551, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico (✆ **888/654-0394;** www.visitajuarez.com). The **El Paso Convention & Visitors Bureau,** One Civic Center Plaza, El Paso, TX 79901 (✆ **800/351-6024** or 915/534-0601; www.elpasocvb.com), can also provide information and advice on trips across the border. If you're on foot, pick up the excellent *Downtown Historic Walking Tour of Juárez* brochure. ***Note:*** Be sure to bring your passport if you cross the border. As of 2008, passports are required for reentry into the U.S.

**TROLLEY TOURS** If possible, I recommend taking one of the tours offered by the **El Paso–Juárez Trolley Company** (✆ **915/544-0062**). Riders board in front of the El Paso Convention and Performing Arts Center downtown and can leave the train to shop or eat at any of eight different stops, then catch another trolley later in the day to return to

 El Paso. The trolleys run daily from 10am to 4pm year-round, but will not make the trip without at least 10 passengers.

## What to See & Do

The "El Paso" map on p. 350 includes many of these locations.

### The Top Attractions

**Juárez Museum of Art** Poorly funded but often artistically inspired, this contemporary, cone-shaped concrete structure is a worthwhile stop for people particularly interested in Mexican art. The museum has three main galleries, with the central structure surrounded by a moat and connected to the others via bridges, and visitors should expect to spend a little less than an hour exploring them. Exhibits change about six times annually, and include historic and contemporary pieces by local artists with a special emphasis on plastic arts.

Av. Lincoln and Av. Ignacio Mejia, in the PRONAF Center area. ✆ **011-52/16-13-17-08.** Free admission. Tues–Sun 11am–7pm.

**La Misíon de Nuestra Señora Guadalupe** Originally built between 1662 and 1668 by Mexican, Spanish, and Indian labor, this is the oldest surviving church in the area and remains an active chapel today. It is considered a prime example of Indian baroque architecture, influenced by Arab tradition, and is adorned with 18th-century sculptures and oil paintings. Next door is a contemporary cathedral; behind the mission is a bronze statue of the founder, Fray Garcia of San Francisco.

Av. 16th de Septiembre, 2 blocks west of Av. Juárez.

## Shopping

Browsing the outdoor markets and specialty stores in Juárez is a favorite pastime of the city's visitors.

Prices are rock bottom for the usual Mexican knickknacks—tapestries, sculptures, and souvenirs—and a bit less than their U.S. counterparts for liquor and food. Bargaining is part of the game at almost every shop in Juárez—it's not bad form to haggle at all. The markets are open daily from morning to evening, but exact hours are up to individual shopkeepers.

Geared toward tourists, the **Juárez City Market,** at Agustin Melgar Street and Avenida 16th de Septiembre, is a fun—although not particularly upscale—shopping spot. The two-story building is loaded with an endless array of velvet paintings, plaster of Paris statues, jewelry, and other standard-issue Mexican souvenirs. If your tastes tend toward posh, try **Decor,** at the intersection of Avenida Ignacio Mejia and Avenida Lincoln, a three-story retail standout chock-full of furniture, glass, ceramics, and jewelry. Other popular shopping spots include the **duty-free stores** at Av. Juárez #378 and Av. 16th de Septiembre #531 for liquor, porcelain, crystal, and perfumes; and **Avenida Juárez,** just south of the Santa Fe Street Bridge, lined with street merchants, souvenir shops, and pharmacies, culminating in the local's market, **Cuauhtemoc Market,** on the south side of the main plaza.

## Where to Dine

**Nuevo Martino** ★ CONTINENTAL/MEXICAN The atmosphere is thick at Nuevo Martino, straight from the jet set days of the 1940s. A favorite of tourists and well-heeled locals, this intimate downtown cafe is dimly lit with red-leather booths, a fully stocked bar, and mirrored walls. White-jacketed waiters serve a full Continental menu, with dishes ranging from quail to octopus to chateaubriand (prepared tableside),

as well as a selection of authentic Mexican entrees. My favorites: the filet *tampiqueño,* a tender cut of beef covered with green chiles and soft jack cheese, served with soup, salad, beans, tacos, and an enchilada; and the black bass medallions Mexicana with minispuds in a rich and spicy red-pepper sauce. The prices beat what you'll find north of the border, and the potent margaritas are not to be missed.

Av. Juárez #643. ✆ **011-52/12-33-70.** Main courses $14–$25. MC, V. Sun and Tues–Thurs noon–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

### Ciudad Juárez After Dark

Juárez is a popular after-dark destination for El Pasoans, and there are numerous bars geared toward tourists on Avenida Juárez downtown and, to the east, Avenida Lincoln. Many of the bars are actually strip clubs, although there are sports bars and nightclubs as well. The can't-miss nightspot is the **Kentucky Club,** 629 Av. Juárez, swank in a Juárez sort of way. You can't do any better if you're looking to spend an afternoon over margaritas—legend has it that the drink was invented here in 1946 by a longtime bartender, the late Lorenzo Garcia. And Hollywood types once frequented this bar: Marilyn Monroe bought the bar a round after a quickie divorce from Arthur Miller.

## 2 SMALL TOWNS OF CENTRAL WEST TEXAS ★

Travelers crossing West Texas pass through a smattering of communities where they'll find a variety of roadside motels and restaurants. But those who only grab some Z's or a quick bite to eat will be missing out on some fun things to see and do. While most of the areas discussed in this section would not be my choice as a vacation destination in and of themselves, they are definitely worth a stop, and one could easily spend anywhere from a few hours to a few days in each place.



### FORT DAVIS & DAVIS MOUNTAINS STATE PARK

205 miles SE of El Paso; 23 miles NE of Alpine; 110 miles NW of Big Bend National Park

A charming small town surrounded by dramatic scenery and steeped in Old West lore, Fort Davis is one of those rare places that can please both city and country types. The town itself is teeming with boutiques and B&Bs, and to the north, outdoors buffs will appreciate Davis Mountains State Park.

The town's origins are tied to Fort Davis, the identically named U.S. Army post established in 1854. The town was initially a ranching center, but the fort's 1891 abandonment and the railroads' decision to bypass the community led to an economic bust. After the fort was designated a National Historic Site in 1961, traffic increased and helped create the tourism-heavy landscape in place today.

#### Essentials

##### Getting There

Fort Davis is located on Tex. 17 between Balmorhea and Marfa. From the north, the town is accessed via I-10 by taking either exit 192 or exit 206 and driving south on the highway for about 40 miles. Tex. 118 also runs through the town, from Kent (on I-10) to the northwest and to Alpine to the southeast. The nearest major commercial airports are 170 miles north in Midland and 205 miles to the northwest in El Paso.

## Getting Around

Fort Davis is centered on the town square and historic courthouse. Most of the businesses, lodging establishments, and restaurants are located on Main Street (Tex. 118), which runs north-south through the town square. You can stroll around town, but not to any of the attractions discussed below.

### Visitor Information

The **Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce,** 4 Memorial Sq. (Box 378), Fort Davis, TX 79734 (✆ **800/524-3015** or 432/426-3015; www.fortdavis.com), provides brochures, advice, and other information.

**FAST FACTS** **Big Bend Regional Medical Center,** 25 miles southeast of Fort Davis at 2600 Tex. 118 N. in Alpine (✆ **432/837-3447**), has 24-hour emergency services. The **post office,** located on the town square on Main Street, is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm.

## What to See & Do

### The Top Attractions

**Fort Davis National Historic Site ★** One of the best remaining examples of a frontier military post, Fort Davis was established in 1854, named after then-secretary of war Jefferson Davis. Surrounded by geological formations that offered natural defense as well as beauty, the fort was first occupied by six companies of the Eighth U.S. Infantry to battle hostile Comanches, Kiowas, and Apaches. Confederate soldiers controlled the fort for a spell in 1861; afterward, the fort sat vacant until 1867. It rose again as a stronghold in the Indian wars of the late 19th century, pitting the African-American 10th U.S. Cavalry and other soldiers against the Apaches, until it was abandoned once and for all in 1891. Ten structures have since been restored, five of which are furnished with period antiques. Most Texas forts are either run-down or sitting in the middle of a barren plain, so this one—well manicured with a stunning rocky backdrop—is a standout. Expect to spend a little more than an hour if you tour all 10 structures.

Tex. 17/118, 1 mile north of Fort Davis. ✆ **432/426-3224.** www.nps.gov/foda. Admission $3 adults, free for children 15 and under. Daily 8am–5pm. Closed major holidays.

**McDonald Observatory ★** (Kids) Operated by the University of Texas and free from urban light pollution, McDonald Observatory is one of the world's leading astronomical research facilities. Start at the visitor center and take in the 12-minute orientation video: It will provide you with perspective both historical and interstellar. Guided tours depart the center several times daily and last about an hour. Twice daily, the visitor center hosts solar-viewing activities, where guests can get a glimpse of sunspots, flares, and other solar activity. If your schedule allows, visit during a nighttime "Star Party" ($10 adults, $8 children) held Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday at times determined by the season. These events allow guests to view celestial objects and constellations through the observatory's high-powered telescopes. Serious stargazers can join as members ($50 and up) in order to stay in the Astronomer's Lodge on-site ($70 per person per night, meals included).

Tex. 118 N., 16 miles northwest of Fort Davis. ✆ **877/984-STAR** (984-7827) for recorded information, or 432/426-3640. www.mcdonaldobservatory.org. Daytime pass (includes guided tour) $8 adults, $7 children 12 and under, $30 maximum per family. Daily 10am–5:30pm. Guided tours are conducted at 11am and 2pm daily.

### Outdoor Activities

Fort Davis's outdoor recreation is centered on **Davis Mountains State Park,** located 4 miles northwest of town via Tex. 118 (✆ **432/426-3337;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us). The

second-highest range in all of Texas, the Davis Mountains reach their pinnacle at the peak of the 8,382-foot Mount Livermore. Hiking is my activity of choice here; try the moderate, 8-mile round-trip that leads to the Fort Davis National Historic Site. On or off the trails, the park is a great place for wildlife viewing and bird-watching. It's one of the few places in the United States where you might spot a Montezuma quail, and javelina (the wild boars that roam the Southwest), tarantulas, horned frogs, and pronghorn antelope also live in the park. The entrance fee is $4 to $5 for adults, free for children 12 and under. Campsites run $20 for full hookups, $15 for water and electric hookups only and $8 to $10 for tent and primitive sites.

## Where to Stay

**Hotel Limpia ★** Spread out over eight historic buildings, the individually decorated rooms at the Hotel Limpia are outfitted with quilted queen- and king-size beds, rocking chairs, and private bathrooms both modern and vintage. The gorgeous 1,100-square-foot master suite in the vine- and stone-clad main building opens from a glassed veranda into a delightful garden area, but if you're looking for privacy, try one of the secluded cottages, located nearly a mile away from the main buildings. (Some of the units have kitchenettes.) There's also a great gift shop with Texas-flavored curios, books, and decor; the county's only bar; and a good restaurant.

101 Memorial Sq. (P.O. Box 1341), Fort Davis, TX 79734. ✆ **800/662-5517** or 432/426-3237. Fax 432/426-3983. www.hotellimpia.com. 43 units, including 25 suites. $89–$115 double; $125–$175 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, complimentary Wi-Fi (some rooms and lobby), kitchenette (in some units), hair dryer, iron.

**Indian Lodge** Located at the base of a gentle slope adjacent to Davis Mountains State Park, this hotel is actually a state park in and unto itself—Indian Lodge State Park. Built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Indian Lodge's architects drew inspiration from Indian pueblos, resulting in 18-inch-thick adobe walls and thatched viga ceilings fashioned from river cane and wooden beams. The original rooms are decorated the same as the day the place opened, with hand-carved cedar chairs, dressers, and bed frames, all with engraved petroglyphs, as well as decorative fireplaces and ornate stonework. A renovation, completed in 2006, undid a 1960s "modernization." All of the rooms are set off from a sunny central patio with a wishing well and rock gardens.

Tex. 118 N., at Davis Mountains State Park (P.O. Box 1707), Fort Davis, TX 79734. ✆ **432/426-3254.** Fax 432/426-2022. www.tpwd.state.tx.us. 39 units, including 1 suite. $90–$125 double; $135 suite. DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor heated pool. *In room:* A/C, cable TV.

**Old Schoolhouse Bed & Breakfast** Situated in a shady grove of 32 pecan trees at the foot of Sleeping Lion Mountain, this B&B served as Fort Davis's schoolhouse from 1904 into the 1930s. It was then a private residence until 1999, when Carla and Steve Kennedy converted it into a charming inn where guests come from Texas's big cities to "decompress." The quaint rooms are scholastically themed: The spacious Reading Room has a king-size bed, a sleeper sofa, and a private entrance; the smaller 'Riting and 'Rithmetic rooms share a bathroom and feature antique furnishings. You won't want to skip the breakfasts here; you'll miss tempting home-cooked entrees such as corn-tortilla quiche, apple-baked oatmeal, or baked eggs with ham and three cheeses.

401 N. Front St. (P.O. Box 1221), Fort Davis, TX 79734. ✆ **432/426-2050.** Fax 432/426-2509. www.schoolhousebnb.com. 3 units, 2 with shared bathroom, 1 guesthouse. $93–$101 double; $195 guesthouse. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. *In room:* A/C, complimentary Wi-Fi, hair dryer, iron, no phone.

## Where to Dine

If you're looking for a quick bite, your best bet is **Murphy's Pizzeria & Café,** at the junction of Tex. 17 and Tex. 118 on the south end of town (✆ **432/426-2020**), serving up better-than-expected pizzas ($8 and up), as well as pasta, sandwiches, and salads. The **Hotel Limpia Dining Room,** 100 State St. (✆ **432/426-3241**), is upscale; main courses are $10 to $25. Upstairs is Sutler's Club, the only watering hole in the traditionally dry county. Membership ($2–$3 for 3 days) is required for nonguests.

## BALMORHEA STATE PARK ★★

185 miles E of El Paso; 32 miles N of Fort Davis

One of the lesser-seen jewels of the Texas State Park system (and one of the smallest, at 45 acres), **Balmorhea State Park,** 9207 Tex. 17 S. (✆ **432/375-2370;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us), is centered on a massive, 1¾-acre swimming pool that is fed by San Solomon Springs. It holds 3.5 million gallons of water at a fairly constant 74°F (23°C). Size aside, this is no ordinary pool: The water teems with fish, and the floor is covered in rocks. The Civilian Conservation Corps built the V-shaped pool in the 1930s, surrounding it with shady trees and a 200-foot circle of limestone and flagstone. Swimming is popular, as are snorkeling and scuba diving. You might see the occasional (nonpoisonous) water snake or turtle in it. A canal system crosscuts the park, leading from the pool to other areas, and providing a habitat for many native fish species, two of which—the Comanche Springs pupfish and Pecos Gambusia—are endangered. There are changing areas with showers and two diving boards at the pool, which is open daily from 8am to sunset. Next door, the **Toyahvale Desert Oasis,** 9225 Tex. 17 S. (✆ **432/375-2572**), provides swimwear, snorkel rentals, and scuba equipment rentals and air fills from 10am to 6pm daily March through October and 10am to 6pm weekends (or by appointment) the rest of the year.

A reconstructed *cienega* (desert wetland) is another notable attraction in Balmorhea State Park. Located near the campground, the San Solomon Cienega is a good spot to look for native wildlife: You might see a Texas spiny soft-shelled turtle, a blotched water snake, or a green heron from the raised wooden platform, or spot a headwater catfish through the underwater viewing window. A path system allows viewing of the fish, reptiles, and amphibians in the canals.

The park has 34 campsites, most with water and electrical hookups, for $11 to $17 a night, in addition to the $7 entrance fee. Additionally, there is a small motel on the park's grounds, with standard double rooms for $60 to $75 and kitchenettes for $80 nightly. For groceries, you'll need to head into town, as the gift shop at the visitor center stocks mainly souvenirs and books. The park is located 4 miles south of the town of Balmorhea on Tex. 17.

## MARFA

115 miles NW of Big Bend National Park; 193 miles SE of El Paso; 21 miles S of Fort Davis

Named after a character in Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov* by a railroad exec's wife, this town of 2,000 residents is on the brink of one of the last American frontiers. Surrounded by rugged terrain, Marfa is, to say the least, remote. Once an Old West saloon-and-casino outpost, the predominantly Mexican town has evolved into a haven for contemporary artists, its nucleus being the avant-garde Chinati Foundation. This phenomenon makes for some interesting contrasts: 10-gallon hats and berets, wine bars and

feed stores, cowboys and intellectuals, all coexisting in the same small town. There's a lot of buzz about Marfa being "the next Santa Fe," but it remains more than a little bit sleepy—and that's a big part of its charm.

## Essentials

### Getting There

Marfa is located at the junction of U.S. 67, U.S. 90, and Tex. 17, 60 miles north of Big Bend Ranch State Park. If you're arriving from the east, take I-10, exit 248, and proceed 82 miles on U.S. 67 through Alpine. From the west, Marfa is located 78 miles southeast of Van Horn on U.S. 90; from the north, it's 60 miles south of I-10, exit 206, on Tex. 17. The nearest major commercial airport is in Midland.

### Getting Around

Tex. 17 (Lincoln St.) is the main north-south artery and U.S. 90 (San Antonio St.) is the main east-west route. The town square and Presidio County Courthouse are located at Lincoln and Highland streets. You can stroll around downtown Marfa, but in general, a car is necessary to check out the Marfa lights and other attractions.

### Visitor Information

Contact the **Marfa Chamber of Commerce,** 207 N. Highland Ave. in the Paisano Hotel (P.O. Box 635), Marfa, TX 79843 (✆ **800/650-9696** or 432/729-4942; www.marfacc.com), for visitor information. The website **www.marfatx.com** is another good resource.

**FAST FACTS** The nearest hospital is 35 miles west in Alpine, the **Big Bend Regional Medical Center,** 2600 Tex. 118 N. (✆ **432/837-3447**). The **post office,** 100 N. Highland Ave., is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 4:30pm.

## The Top Attractions

Besides the attractions listed below, **Big Bend Ranch State Park** ★★, 60 miles south of Marfa (✆ **432/358-4444;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us), is Texas's largest state park at over 300,000 acres and rivals Big Bend for a scenic desert wonderland featuring both the river and mountains. There are primitive sites in the remote interior and great hiking opportunities in and around the Solitario, a huge volcanic swelling in the eastern end of the park. Entrance fees are $3 for adults and free for kids 12 and under. Campsites are $8. Mountain bike rentals, tours, and horseback rides are available at the Sauceda visitor center in the park's interior. There is also lodging available at Sauceda for $25 to $100 per night.

**Chinati Foundation** ★★ Finds Housed in 15 buildings at a former U.S. Army post, this decidedly different arts facility is the centerpiece of Marfa's fertile contemporary arts scene. Founded in 1985 by the late Donald Judd, the permanent collection consists of numerous works of minimalist and avant-garde art in mediums ranging from paper to steel, from fluorescent light to concrete. Defying artistic expectations, the pieces are all about context; each is strongly tied to architecture and landscape. There are also temporary displays and exhibitions by an international group of artists-in-residence. Guided tours last about 4 hours, starting at 10am, breaking for lunch, and continuing at 2pm. The foundation hosts a major open house every October. Marfa's population momentarily doubles during the event, selling out every hotel within a 100-mile radius.

U.S. 67 (1½ mile south of Marfa). ✆ **432/729-4362.** www.chinati.org. Admission $10 adults, $5 students and seniors, free for children 11 and under. No public admission except by guided tours, which are offered Wed–Sun at 10am and 2pm.

## Marfa's Mystery Lights

In 1883, an illumination flickered on the horizon east of Marfa, spooking a young cowhand by the name of Robert Ellison. Fearing the lights were Apache campfires, Ellison left behind the cattle he was herding and searched the terrain on horseback. He found nothing. Ever since, the **"Marfa Ghost Lights"** have puzzled thousands of eyewitnesses, as they appear, disappear, and reappear in an area where there are no roads, no houses, and no human inhabitants. Some observers insist the lights are the work of supernatural beings or visiting aliens, while others point to electrostatic discharge, car headlights, campfires, or swamp gas as the real cause, but no one has definitively solved the mystery.

There is a nifty viewing area 9 miles east of Marfa on U.S. 90. The lights are best viewed between 2 and 4 hours after sundown: Look to the northeast, just to the right of the mountains, along the horizon for the sporadic flickers of light. If there's a crowd, it's a scene straight out of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. If the lights really pique your interest, don't miss the annual **Marfa Lights Festival,** a Labor Day weekend celebration with a parade, street dances, concerts, and arts-and-crafts sales.



**Marfa and Presidio County Museum** Housed in the historic Victorian adobe Humphris-Humphreys House, this museum focuses on the area since 1883, with exhibits on ranching, mining, and military history. I recommend it mainly for the excellent collection of black-and-white photographs shot by Frank Duncan in the first half of the 20th century, and a natural history exhibit on the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert. Allow 1 hour.

110 W. San Antonio St. ✆ **432/729-4140.** Free admission, donations accepted. Tues–Sat 2–5pm and by appointment.

**Presidio County Courthouse** Built in 1885 for $60,000—and magnificently restored in 2001 for $2.5 million—this courthouse is one of West Texas's most impressive, with its magnificent domed roof and classical Victorian woodwork. The architectural style is Second Empire with Italianate details such as overhanging eaves, decorative brackets, and windows that delineate the floors. A "Statue of Justice" stands atop the dome, sans the traditional scales. According to local legend, a convicted cowboy shot the scales out of the statue's hands in the 1890s, proclaiming, "There is no justice in this country." If you have the time, climb to the fifth floor for the view of Marfa and the surrounding countryside.

Lincoln St. and Highland Ave. ✆ **432/729-4942** for information. Free admission. Building Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; grounds 24 hr.

## Where to Stay

**Cibolo Creek Ranch ★★★** Tucked under the Chinati Mountains in some of the most wide-open country in all of Texas, this is a getaway for the most special of occasions, and accordingly priced. Situated on a 32,000-acre ranch that's a world away from the

outside world (and home to bison, elk, and Texas longhorns), the ranch is centered on a restoration of a historic 19th-century private fort, the domain of trader and cattle baron Milton Faver until the 1880s. The idyllic setting plays host today to a first-class resort, featuring picture-perfect guest rooms with red-tile floors, adobe walls, and sumptuous border decor. The recreation is as impressive as the scenery: Horseback rides and Humvee tours are available for a fee. Trails crisscross the property. Natural springs feed canals that fill an idyllic lake, complete with fish to lure and paddle boats to paddle. Gourmet meals, served family style, are part of the package at the remote ranch.

P.O. Box 44, Shafter, TX 79850. ✆ **432/229-3737.** Fax 432/229-3653. www.cibolocreekranch.com. 32 units. $475 double; $75 per additional person. Rates include all meals and many recreational activities. AE, DISC, MC, V. Located 32 miles south of Marfa off U.S. 67. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; activities desk. *In room:* A/C, coffeemaker, no phone.

**The Hotel Paisano ★★** After years of semihibernation, this glorious 1930s-era hotel was rescued in 2001 by the proprietors of the Hotel Limpia in nearby Fort Davis. A comprehensive restoration later, the property has reclaimed its former status as the premier hotel between El Paso and San Antonio. The building itself is stunning, a renowned hybrid of prairie and mission architecture that's listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Inside, the rooms balance history and modernity, with comfortable new furnishings and a myriad of arches, stained-glass windows, and other subtle details. And there's some serious Hollywood lore: The cast and crew of the epic *Giant* stayed here during production in the 1950s. James Dean's one-time room is the most popular, but Rock Hudson's corner suite, with a full kitchen and a massive balcony overlooking the courtyard pool, is my favorite.

Texas St. and Highland Ave. (P.O. Box Z), Marfa, TX 79843. ✆ **866/729-3669** or 432/729-3669. Fax 432/426-3779. www.hotelpaisano.com. 40 units, including 9 suites. $99–$159 double; $159–$250 suites. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor heated pool; complimentary Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, kitchen, no phone.

**The Thunderbird Hotel ★★** This one-time roadside motel became a hip work of minimalist art during a 2004 renovation. Centered on an outdoor pool and a gravel parking lot, the U-shaped structure's rooms are starkly contemporary with Western details (for example, cowhide rugs atop painted concrete floors) and such modern perks as iPod docking stations. The pool and adjacent fire-pit area have wireless Internet access, and the rooms are wired. Available for rental here: cruiser bikes ($20 a day), vintage record players ($10 a stay), DVDs from a well-chosen library ($3 a night), and a typewriter (free).

601 W. San Antonio St. and Highland Ave., Marfa, TX 79843. ✆ **432/729-1984.** Fax 432/729-1989. www.thunderbirdmarfa.com. 24 units. $130–$190 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; bike rentals. *In room:* A/C, cable TV/DVD, dataport, complimentary Wi-Fi (some rooms), minibar, hair dryer.

## Where to Dine

Beyond the greasy spoons, there are a few high-end restaurants in Marfa, including **Jett's Grill** at the Hotel Paisano, Texas Street and Highland Avenue (✆ **432/729-3838**). Named after James Dean's character in *Giant,* the restaurant serves dinner only and features Continental fare spiced with a south-of-the-border twist. Main courses run $10 to $25. Another upscale option is **Maiya's,** 103 N. Highland Ave. (✆ **432/729-4410**), offering a creative selection of northern Italian fare in a very sleek, very red space. It's open Wednesday through Saturday evenings, with most dishes between $15 and $30.

## Gallery Hopping in the Big Bend

Marfa might be one of the most buzzed-about art towns in the West, but—outside of the Chinati Foundation—it has only a handful of galleries. Art aficionados can cover Marfa's gallery scene proper in a few hours, but a day can be made of visiting galleries in not only Marfa, but Alpine and Marathon as well. Here are my favorites.

***Marfa*** I like **Ballroom Marfa,** an installation-oriented space at 108 E. San Antonio St. (✆ **432/729-3600;** www.ballroommarfa.org), that also hosts film screenings, lectures, and musical performances; and the photography-laden **Highland Gallery,** 119 N. Highland Ave. (✆ **432/729-3000**).

***Alpine*** Keri Artzt's **Kiowa Gallery,** 105 E. Holland Ave. (✆ **432/837-3067**), is my favorite in the region, with an eclectic collection of mostly regional work, ranging from elegant to oddball. **Ivey's Emporium,** 109 E. Holland Ave. (✆ **432/837-7474**), has a wide range of artworks and gifts.

***Marathon*** **Baxter Gallery,** 209 W. U.S. 90 (✆ **432/386-0689;** www.baxtergallery.com), specializes in landscapes and wildlife sculptures by local artisans. The fine art photography at **James Evans Gallery,** 21 S. 1st St. (✆ **432/386-4366;** www.jevansgallery.com), is alternately sublime and stunning.



### Shopping

The best bookstore in the entire region is the sophisticated **Marfa Book Co.,** 105 S. Highland Ave. (✆ **432/729-3906;** www.marfabookco.com), which features a coffee and wine bar and a deep inventory of art and architecture titles.

## ALPINE

80 miles N of Big Bend National Park; 26 miles E of Marfa; 23 miles SE of Fort Davis

The home of Sul Ross State University, Alpine is nicknamed "The Hub of the Big Bend." Long the commercial center of vast Brewster County, this town of 6,500 has numerous amenities that make it a good jumping-off point to Big Bend National Park, or a nice stopover while en route to other area destinations: a vibrant Main Street with plenty of galleries and funky retailers, excellent hiking in all directions, an active railroad depot on the Southern Pacific line, and festivals and museums that are pure West.

### Essentials

#### Getting There

Alpine is located at the junction of U.S. 67/90 and Tex. 118, just 80 miles north of Big Bend National Park. If you're arriving from the east, take I-10, exit 248, and proceed 56 miles on U.S. 67. From the west, Alpine is located 55 miles south of Balmorhea (I-10, exit 206). **Amtrak** (✆ **800/872-2745;** www.amtrak.com) serves the train station at 102 W. Holland St., the closest depot to Big Bend National Park. The nearest major commercial airport is in Midland.

## Getting Around

U.S. 67/90 (Holland St.) is the main east-west artery and Tex. 119 (5th St.) is the main north-south route; downtown is centered on the intersection of the two. Rental cars are available through **Alpine Auto Rental** (✆ **800/894-3463** or 432/837-3463; www.alpineautorental.com).

## Visitor Information

Contact the **Alpine Chamber of Commerce,** 106 N. 3rd St., Alpine, TX 79830 (✆ **800/561-3712** or 432/837-2326; www.alpinetexas.com).

**FAST FACTS** The **Big Bend Regional Medical Center,** 2600 Tex. 118 N. (✆ **432/837-3447;** www.bigbendhealthcare.com), has the only 24-hour emergency room in the region. The **post office,** 901 W. Holland Ave., is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm, and Saturday 10am to 1pm.

## The Top Attractions

### Elephant Mountain Wildlife Management Area

While hiking and camping are available, the prime activity here is a 15-mile round-trip driving tour that provides excellent wildlife-viewing opportunities. The area is home to a herd of desert bighorn, as well as mule deer, javelina, and dozens of reptile and bird species. Morning is the best time to spot the critters in this mountainous desert environment. There are primitive campsites with fire rings available at no cost.

26 miles south of Alpine via Tex. 118. ✆ **432/837-3251.** Free admission. Portions of the area are open year-round; driving tour May 1–Aug 30.

### Museum of the Big Bend ★

This excellent facility tracks the Big Bend region's history, from American Indian cultures (points that date back more than 3,000 years) to the "Conquistador to Cowboy" exhibit, telling the story of European settlers. Among the other highlights are replicas of pterosaur bones excavated from Big Bend National Park and a plane-size scale model of the real deal flying in the rafters—the critter had a 51-foot wingspan!—and an outdoor cactus garden. Expect to spend about an hour.

On the campus of the Sul Ross State University. ✆ **432/837-8143.** www.sulross.edu/~museum. Free admission; donations accepted. Tues–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm.

## Where to Stay

### Holland Hotel

Originally opening on Alpine's main drag in the 1920s, the Holland Hotel has been completely renovated in recent years and has a wide variety of lodgings to choose from. No room here is exactly the same as another, ranging from newly retouched suites (with hardwood floors, antique furnishings, and jetted tubs) to the cozy fourth-floor Crow's Nest, complete with a private rooftop deck. Rooms may also be combined to create a variety of differently sized suites. There are four modern lofts in a nearby rental, the largest of which is more than 1,000 square feet. On the ground floor is the Edelweiss Brewery and Restaurant.

209 W. Holland Ave., Alpine, TX 79830. ✆ **800/535-8040** or 432/837-3844. Fax 432/837-7346. www.hollandhotel.net. 29 units, including 4 lofts. $39–$195 double; $75–$250 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (German/microbrewery). *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, coffeemaker, no phone (some rooms).

### The Maverick Inn ★

A retro-minded and upscale update of a roadside motel—down to its newer old-fashioned neon sign—the Maverick Inn took cues from the Gage Hotel and other historic desert tourist outposts. Studies in masculine Texas chic, the

 woody, adobe-walled rooms have Saltillo tile floors with cowhide rugs. The small, bean-shaped pool is an oasis, bordered by desert flora and a shaded patio.

1200 E. Holland Ave., Alpine, TX 79830. ✆ **432/837-0628.** Fax 432/837-0825. www.themaverickinn.com. 18 units. $90–$140 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, complimentary Wi-Fi, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker.

### Where to Dine

Named for a ranch in *Giant,* the **Reata Restaurant,** 203 N. 5th St. (✆ **432/837-9232;** www.reata.net), serves Texas nouveau and some of the meanest steaks in the Big Bend; main courses are $8 to $10 for lunch and $15 to $30 for dinner. **Alicia's,** 708 E. Gallego Ave. (✆ **432/837-2802**), is a standby for big burritos and hearty breakfasts (about $3–$8). **Texas Fusion,** 200 W. Murphy Ave. (✆ **432/837-1214**), is locals' favorite, serving barbecue, Mexican, burgers, and steaks; main courses are $5 to $16.

## 3 MIDLAND-ODESSA

300 miles E of El Paso; 135 miles S of Lubbock

Welcome to oil country, where the ups and downs of the petroleum industry have long defined these twin cities, 21 miles apart on I-20. Midland-Odessa sits in the geographic center of the Permian Basin, the home of the country's richest oil fields—about 20% of the United States' reserves. Today, only Alaska produces more oil than the Permian Basin.

The area saw the first of several oil booms in the 1920s. However, less than a decade later, the Great Depression brought on the first of several busts. Production increased during World War II, but foreign competition brought on another bust by the 1970s. The pendulum again swayed in the boom direction until 1982, when the bottom suddenly fell out of the oil market: Wells were capped, new houses went unsold, and banks failed. In the time since, the industry has diversified and recovered, but Midland-Odessa remains the heart and soul of the Permian Basin's oil industry. As it goes, so does Midland-Odessa.

The one-time home of two presidents—George H. W. Bush and his son George W.—the cities are home to a handful of noteworthy attractions and offer an educational glimpse at the rewards and the ravages of a volatile, oil-heavy economy. But Midland-Odessa is by no means a tourist destination—it's really an overnight stopover on the dusty and dry West Texas plains.



### ESSENTIALS

#### Getting There

Midland is located on the north side of I-20, accessible via exits 136 and 138. Tex. 349 runs north-south through the city. Odessa is located 21 miles west of Midland on the north side of I-20, accessible via exits 112 through 121. U.S. 385 (Grant Ave.) bisects the city north-south, through downtown and to I-20.

**Midland International Airport,** located between Midland and Odessa at 9506 La Force Blvd. (✆ **432/560-2200;** www.flymaf.com), is the primary commercial airport in the area, served by **American, Continental, Southwest,** and **New Mexico Airlines.** Car-rental companies are on-site.

## Getting Around

Laid out on a fairly standard grid that parallels I-20, Midland is a relatively easy city to navigate by car. Most of the accommodations are located on the west side of town on **Wall Street (Business 20),** which continues east through downtown. **Loop 250** circumnavigates the city.

Odessa's busiest street is **Grant Avenue (U.S. 385, also known as Andrews Hwy.),** which runs north-south through downtown. **42nd Street** becomes **Tex. 191** and continues east to Midland. **Loop 338** circles the city.

## Visitor Information

The **Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau,** 109 N. Main St., Midland, TX 79701 (✆ **800/624-6435** or 432/683-3381; www.visitmidlandtexas.com), and the **Odessa Convention and Visitors Bureau,** 700 N. Grant Ave., Ste. 200, Odessa, TX 79761 (✆ **800/780-4678** or 432/333-7871; www.odessacvb.com), can provide additional information on the cities. There is a new visitor center in Midland just north of I-20 on Old Rankin Highway.

**FAST FACTS** **Midland Memorial Hospital,** 2200 W. Illinois Ave. (✆ **432/685-1111**), has a 24-hour emergency room; Midland's **downtown post office** is at 100 E. Wall St. **Medical Center Hospital,** 500 W. 4th St. (✆ **432/640-4000**), is Odessa's largest full-service hospital; the **main post office** is located at 200 N. Texas St.

# WHAT TO SEE & DO

## The Top Attractions

Fans of roadside kitsch surely will appreciate two Odessa landmarks: The world's largest jack rabbit is located on 8th Street and Sam Houston Avenue; and on the campus of the University of Texas of the Permian Basin at 4901 E. University Blvd. sits a 70% scale replica of Stonehenge.

**American Airpower Heritage Museum** ★ With a "Ghost Squadron" of more than 130 planes and choppers, this museum is home to the world's largest collection of vintage World War II aircraft. It's worth an hour or two for aviation and history buffs. The planes are housed in an adjacent 60,000-square-foot hangar, with about 15 on display at any given time. There are also multimedia exhibits and nice collections of war artifacts and aviation nose art. The museum's operators sponsor the annual AIRSHO each October, featuring dramatic re-creations of World War II events.

9600 Wright Dr. at Midland International Airport. ✆ **432/563-1000** or 567-3009. www.airpowermuseum.org. Admission $10 adults, $9 teens and seniors, $7 children 6 to 12, free for children 5 and under. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun and holidays noon–5pm.

**The Globe of the Great Southwest** Finds This theater is a replica of London's Globe Theatre (William Shakespeare's old haunt), down to the octagonal design and jutting stage surrounded by seating. The resident company produces about eight plays annually; the emphasis is on Shakespeare. The theater also hosts touring productions and concerts.

2308 Shakespeare Rd., Odessa. ✆ **432/332-1586** or 580-3177. www.globesw.org. Admission $5. Tickets for performances $10–$12. Mon–Fri 10am–6pm. Tours available by appointment only.

**Museum of the Southwest** ★ Kids Occupying the stately Turner Mansion (1934), this museum does a nice job displaying art and archaeological artifacts. I was impressed by the quality of the museum's permanent collection, with pieces by several Taos Society

 members and a wide range of indigenous art. Also on-site: a children's museum, with interactive exhibits on art and science and a kid-size town; and a planetarium, which at press time was undergoing renovations and was expected to reopen in fall 2009. Expect to spend an hour or two here.

1705 W. Missouri Ave., Midland. ✆ **432/683-2882.** www.museumsw.org. Free admission to museum (donations welcome); children's museum $3; call for planetarium admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm.

**Odessa Meteor Crater and Museum** The second-largest meteor crater in the United States (bested only by Sunset Crater near Flagstaff, Arizona) is about 50,000 years old, born when a flaming hunk of asteroid collided with the West Texas plains. A National Natural Landmark, the crater was once 550 feet wide and 100 feet deep, but sediment has obscured it substantially. It's still big enough to encompass a short nature trail, marked with interpretive signs detailing the initial impact and the subsequent study The museum houses chunks of the actual meteorite among its displays. Expect to spend 45 minutes here.

Meteor Crater Rd. (9 miles southwest of Odessa via I-10, exit 108). ✆ **432/381-0946.** Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm.

**The Permian Basin Petroleum Museum** Midland, being the center of both the Permian Basin (geographically) and the American oil business (economically), is the ideal location for a museum dedicated to "black gold." Requiring a little more than an hour of time to investigate, the displays here are a tad dated and often come off as PR for the Texas oil industry. Nonetheless, the museum interprets both the prehistoric basis for the rich oil field—West Texas was a tropical sea 230 million years ago—and the industry's modern history.

1500 I-20 W. (exit 136), Midland. ✆ **432/683-4403.** www.petroleummuseum.org. Admission $8 adults, $6 youths 12–17 and seniors, $5 children 6–11, free for children 5 and under. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm.







**The Presidential Museum ★** Whereas many museums detail the life and times of one president, this is one of a few museums dedicated to the office of the U.S. presidency itself. There is a gallery of portraits including every president from Washington to Obama, and the collection of campaign memorabilia is exhaustive and fascinating, with scores of buttons, posters, and stickers hyping candidates from every imaginable party. Expect to spend an hour or two.

4919 E. University Blvd., Odessa. ✆ **432/363-7737.** www.presidentialmuseum.org. $8 adults, $5 students and seniors, free for children 4 and under. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm. Closed major holidays.

## Outdoor Activities & Spectator Sports

Midland has two public golf courses: the 27-hole **Hogan Park Golf Course,** 3600 N. Fairground Rd. (✆ **432/685-7360;** www.hoganparkgolf.com), with greens fees for 18 holes of $12 to $20, and carts for $18; and the 18-hole **Nueva Vista Golf Club,** 6101 W. Wadley Ave. (✆ **432/520-0500;** www.nuevavistagolf.com), with greens fees of $16 to $28 and carts for $12 per rider. In Odessa, **Sunset Country Club,** 9301 Andrews Hwy. (✆ **432/366-1061**), is an 18-hole course open to the public year-round. Greens fees are $14 to $19, and carts are $11.

Baseball fans can get their fix in the form of the **Midland RockHounds** (✆ **432/520-2255;** www.midlandrockhounds.org), the AA Texas League affiliate of the Oakland Athletics. The RockHounds play 70 home dates from April to August at the First American Bank Ballpark, 5514 Champions Dr. Tickets cost $5 to $10. The Central Hockey League's

**Odessa Jackalopes** (✆ **432/552-7825;** www.jackalopes.org) play an October-to-March schedule at the Ector County Coliseum, 42nd Street and Andrews Highway. Tickets run $9 to $25. But it's high-school football that is the sport of choice in Midland-Odessa, which provides the backdrop to the best-selling book *Friday Night Lights.*

## WHERE TO STAY

**Hilton Midland Plaza ★** If you're looking for luxury at a reasonable price, look no further than this full-service hotel, located at ground zero of the American oil business in downtown Midland. The hotel consists of two 11-story towers on either side of a courtyard pool. Graced with a three-level atrium, the lobby is relaxing and inviting, and the guest rooms are spacious and comfortable. Every room has plush chairs, a pair of two-line phones, and a 32- or 42-inch flatscreen television. Some of the rooms on the concierge level have balconies. The facilities are terrific, including restaurants serving three meals daily, a pair of bars, and a top-flight exercise room.

117 W. Wall St., Midland, TX 79701. ✆ **432/683-6131.** Fax 432/683-0958. www.midland.hilton.com. 249 units. $109–$229 double; $209–$350 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor heated pool; exercise room; spa; Jacuzzi; concierge; business center; limited room service; laundry service/dry cleaning; executive level. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**MCM Eleganté ★** This former Radisson reopened as an independent in 2002 under the tag "tropical elegance in the desert." With a lobby boasting multihued floral carpeting, stained-glass chandeliers, and a large aquarium, the hotel is a bit over-the-top, but it hits the mark more often than not. With nice city views from wall-length windows, crown molding, and red-hued wood furnishings, the rooms go beyond what you'd expect in a chain, with plenty of perks. (One example: The smallish bathrooms are stocked with bottled water—guests readily pay the $3.50 price tag once they get a taste of what's on tap.) The recreational facilities are dynamite, including a jogging track, a putting/chipping green, a seasonally domed pool area, and several sports fields.

5200 E. University Blvd., Odessa, TX 79762. ✆ **866/368-5885** or 432/368-5885. Fax 432/362-8958. www.mcmelegante.com. 191 units, including 4 suites. $99–$209 double; $279–$449 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; exercise room; spa; Jacuzzi; car-rental desk; courtesy car; salon; limited room service; dry cleaning; executive level. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, complimentary Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

My pick for a quick bite in the area is **Manuel's Crispy Tacos,** 1404 E. 2nd St., Odessa (✆ **432/333-2751**), a fun family joint known for its namesake dish. Main courses are $5 to $16. Also recommended is **The Bar,** 606 W. Missouri Ave. (✆ **432/685-1757**), a taxidermy- and petroliana-laden establishment with burgers and pub fare.

**Wall Street Bar and Grill ★** BISTRO With a stock ticker over the front entrance, this restaurant caters to the wheelers and dealers of Midland's business community, but history buffs will find other things to gawk at while they dine. The 1910 building, originally a saddle shop, still features the original pressed-tin ceiling, and the cherry-stained mahogany bar and back bar received a commendation from the Texas Historical Foundation for their restoration. The menu, conversely, is contemporary, with tastily creative offerings such as seafood *rellenos* with chipotle-tomatillo sauce, pecan-crusted trout, and charbroiled pork chops. The crawfish étouffée, rich and thick, is just about as good as it gets.

115 E. Wall St., Midland. ✆ **432/684-8686.** Main courses $9–$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2:30pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm; Sun brunch 10:30am–2:30pm.

## DUNE SLEDDING IN MONAHANS SANDHILLS STATE PARK

30 miles W of Odessa

When Spanish explorers first stumbled upon these sandhills in the mid–16th century, they labeled them "perfect miniature Alps of sand." Perpetually changing geologic and geometric wonders, the 3,840 acres of dunes at **Monahans Sandhills State Park,** I-20 exit 86 (✆ **432/943-2092;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us), represent the only public access to a 200-mile range of dunes that stretches from eastern New Mexico into the Permian Basin of West Texas.

Start at the visitor center, where you can watch a short orientation video, check out exhibits on all things sandy, and trek through the dunes on a .25-mile interpretive trail. The center rents plastic disks and toboggans for West Texas–style sledding, down dune slopes that top out at 70 feet in height. Besides sledding them, you can explore the dunes on foot or horseback. (You'll need to bring your own horse to the 600-acre equestrian area; no stables are on-site.)

The dunes are far from barren. Many plants thrive here, including the shin oak, an unusually small oak with unusually large acorns that creates a "Lilliputian Jungle" in the park. Other native inhabitants are deer, coyote, possum, and bobcats. For the human guests, there are 24 back-in campsites with water and electricity for $14 a night; the day-use fee is $2 (free for children 12 and under). The park is open daily from 8am to 10pm.

If you're a Coca-Cola fanatic, stop in at **Big Burger and Coca-Cola Museum,** 1016 Stockton St. in Monahans, off of I-20 exit 80 (✆ **432/943-5655**), an all-American burger joint plastered with every imaginable piece of Coke memorabilia. Most menu items range from $4 to $8; the fried catfish dinners merit a detour.







# 4 SAN ANGELO

224 miles NW of Austin; 111 miles SE of Midland; 64 miles N of Sonora

First known as "the town over the river" from Fort Concho, San Angelo was the prototypical rollicking, gunslinging Wild West outpost during the late 1860s and 1870s. During these early days, the soldiers from the fort and cowhands from the field would cross the Concho River to get to the brothels, casinos, and saloons that dominated the town on the other side.

A city of about 100,000 residents, modern San Angelo is worthy of a stop on a cross-Texas road trip. Its rowdy past can be revisited in the form of Historic Concho Avenue, now lined with boutiques and jewelers instead of casinos and bordellos, and old Fort Concho, a National Historic Landmark. The city is also one of the few oases of West Texas, with the Concho snaking through town and five reservoirs within 40 miles, and home to a noteworthy arts scene.

## ESSENTIALS

### Getting There

The largest city in Texas not located on an interstate, San Angelo lies at the junction of three U.S. highways: 67, 87, and 277. U.S. 87 crosses I-20 at Big Spring, and U.S. 67 and U.S. 277 are both accessible from I-20 near Abilene. From the south, U.S. 67 diverges from I-10 at Fort Stockton and U.S. 277 crosses the interstate at Sonora.

**San Angelo Regional Airport/Mathis Field,** located about 8 miles south of the city at 7654 Knickerbocker Rd. (✆ **325/659-6409;** www.mathisfield.com), is the only commercial airport in the Concho River Valley and is served by **Continental** (✆ **800/523-3273**) and **American** (✆ **800/433-7300**). Car rentals are available at the airport from **Avis, Budget,** and **Hertz.**

### Getting Around

With the confluence of the north and south forks of the Concho River marking the city center, bridges seem to be everywhere and can often make navigation by car a bit tricky. **Bryant Boulevard** (U.S. 87/277) is the major north-south street, but it splits into two one-way streets (the northbound **Koenigheim St.** and southbound **Abe St.**) in the middle of the city. **Chadbourne Street,** just a few blocks east of Bryant Boulevard, runs through the historic part of the city, skirting downtown and **Historic Concho Avenue** en route to Fort Concho and other attractions.

The **civic bus system** (✆ **325/947-8729**) operates five routes from the Historic Santa Fe Depot at 703 S. Chadbourne St., from 6:30am to 6:30pm Monday through Friday and from 9:30am to 6:30pm Saturday. Fare is $1 for adults, 50¢ for students and seniors, and free for any accompanying children 4 and under.

### Visitor Information

The **San Angelo Convention and Visitors Bureau,** 418 W. Ave. B., San Angelo, TX 76903 (✆ **800/375-1206** or 325/655-4136; www.sanangelo.org), operates a visitor center, open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday 10am to 5pm, and Sunday noon to 4pm.

**FAST FACTS** San Angelo has two 24-hour emergency rooms: **San Angelo Community Medical Center,** 3501 Knickerbocker Rd. (✆ **325/949-9511;** www.sacmc.com), and **Shannon Medical Center,** 120 E. Harris Ave. (✆ **325/653-6741;** www.shannonhealth.com). The **main post office,** 1 N. Abe St., is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5:30pm, Saturday from 9am to 4:30pm.



## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### The Top Attractions

Worth a peek is **Paint Brush Alley,** between Concho and Twohig avenues downtown, an imaginative reinvention of an alley as an urban gallery of murals by different artists. Also of note is **Miss Hattie's Bordello Museum,** 18½ E. Concho Ave. (www.misshatties.com). The restored brothel offers tours Friday and Saturday every hour from 1 to 4pm and Monday through Wednesday at 2 and 4pm; admission is $5 per person. Call **Legend Jewelers** (✆ **888/655-4367** or 325/653-0112) for a tour.

**Fort Concho National Historic Landmark** Established in 1867 as a means of pioneer defense, Fort Concho provided the impetus for San Angelo's original development. Originally 40 buildings on 1,000 acres, this U.S. Army post, once commanded by William "Pecos Bill" Shafter, was active until 1889, with black Buffalo Soldiers making up a considerable portion of the men stationed here. The post is now one of the jewels of the old Texas forts, with 17 original buildings and 5 rebuilt structures. Some of the buildings are fully furnished with period artifacts, including a barracks outfitted to an 1870s T, down to the last checker on the board. There are exhibits in two of the restored officers' quarters (one is a small museum on telephony, featuring one of Alexander Graham Bell's originals) and the old post headquarters. The former hospital now serves as the interesting **Robert Wood**

**Johnson Museum of Frontier Medicine,** including a re-created ward, some interesting snake oil cure-alls, and the Victorian prototype for the TV-shopping mainstay of electrostimulation. Expect to spend a little more than an hour here.

630 S. Oakes St. ✆ **325/481-2646.** www.fortconcho.com. Admission $3 adults, $2 seniors, $1.50 students, free for children 5 and under. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm.

**River Walk ★** Thanks to the River Beautification Project, which kicked off in 1986, the Concho River is now a splendid centerpiece for the entire city of San Angelo. It sports a 4-mile walking/jogging trail, bountiful outdoor gardens and water displays, a great playground, and even a 9-hole golf course (✆ **325/657-4485**) on the River Walk's acres (greens fees $8–$10). Celebration Bridge crosses the river behind the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts (see below), right past a bronze statue of a mermaid, "Pearl of the Conchos." Between the bridge and the old downtown plaza (El Paseo de Santa Angela) sits the Bill Aylor, Sr., Memorial RiverStage, an outdoor venue that is a focus of San Angelo's performing arts scene. The River Walk provides easy access to the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, Historic Concho Avenue, and Fort Concho.

Along the banks of the Concho River.

**San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts ★** From its eye-catching home on the Concho River, this standout museum is a must-see for lovers of art and architecture, demanding a stop of 45 minutes or more. The permanent collection focuses on contemporary American ceramics, with 150 such pieces, and every year from April to June, the museum features the country's top ceramics show, with a national competition in even-numbered years. Another nice perk: The museum has an open back office that allows visitors to see how the facility is managed and get a glimpse into the storage areas. The award-winning building is a work of art in itself, consisting of native limestone, in-grain mesquite flooring, and a curving, copper-clad roof.

1 Love St. on the Concho River. ✆ **325/653-3333.** www.samfa.org. Admission $2 adults, $1 seniors, free for students and children. Tues–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 1–4pm. Closed major holidays.



## Outdoor Activities

When it comes to outdoor recreation, San Angelo residents are blessed with the Concho River, two reservoirs, and an excellent civic park system. The highlight is **San Angelo State Park ★**, 3900-2 Mercedes St. (✆ **325/949-4757;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us), at O.C. Fisher Lake on the city's northwest side, attracting mountain bikers, hikers, boaters, anglers, and equestrians. The park sits at the nexus of four distinct geographical areas—Hill Country, Trans-Pecos, the rolling plains to the east, and the high plains to the north—in an area that has been inhabited by humans for over 10,000 years. Admission to the park is $3 per adult and free for children 12 and under. The day-use hours are from 8am to 10pm.

The park's trail system is one of the best in all of West Texas, with more than 50 miles of multiuse trails (hiking, biking, horseback riding). Certain trails provide access to the only ride-in, equestrian campsites between El Paso and San Antonio. The trails connect the north and south shores of the reservoir and range from flat and smooth to rocky and rugged; a detailed map is available at the entrance. There are ample opportunities for birding and wildlife-watching, with 300 avian and 50 mammal species (including pelicans, cormorants, Texas longhorn cattle, and buffalo), and a significant population of horned lizards. In season, hunting and fishing are popular.

On guided tours, visitors can take a look at the petroglyphs in the park, go on a 3-mile hike to fossilized footprints, or learn about the history of buffalo and Texas longhorn. The tours are informative, engaging, and offered on demand (fees are charged).

There are 85 campsites with water and electric hookups here, and more than 100 tent sites. The campground on the north shore, shaded by massive pecan trees, is especially isolated and attractive, while the southern campgrounds are closer to the reservoir and playground. Nightly camping fees, in addition to park entrance fees, are $8 to $18. There are also a few simple cabins that can accommodate six guests for $36 to $45 a night.

Six miles south of downtown via Knickerbocker Road, the city-owned **Lake Nasworthy** is a fishing, hiking, and boating hot spot. Below the nearly 1,600 surface acres of fresh water, two nonnative saltwater species (hybrid trout-corvina and red drum) have thrived alongside native bass and catfish. **Spring Creek Marina & RV Park,** 45 Fisherman's Rd. (✆ **800/500-7801** or 325/944-3850; www.springcreekmarina-rv.com), has campsites with full hookups ($30–$38 nightly), tent sites ($25 nightly), cabins ($70–$100 nightly), boat rentals, and a convenience store.

The **San Angelo Nature Center** at Lake Nasworthy, 7409 Knickerbocker Rd. (✆ **325/942-0121**), is a small museum with a garden, a library, and a short interpretive trail system. The center is open Tuesday through Saturday from noon to 5pm.

The **Pictographs of Painted Rocks,** called a "museum, library, and art gallery" of ancient American Indians, is another noteworthy excursion near San Angelo. Located 22 miles southeast of the city near the town of Paint Rock, the site features a natural limestone wall adorned with more than 1,600 pictographs. On the winter solstice, rays of light reflect off of an ornate, otherwise invisible painting known as "Sun Dagger." For information on tours, call ✆ **325/732-4376.**

The municipal park system in San Angelo is a cut above average, with the **River Walk** (p. 380) and **Civic League Park,** West Beauregard and Park streets, featuring the International Water Lily Garden. This garden displays lily species from all over the globe that bloom both day and night during the spring and summer. Call **San Angelo Park Headquarters** at ✆ **325/657-4279** for additional information on the city's park system.

**BOATING & FISHING** In addition to O. C. Fisher Lake and Lake Nasworthy (see above), there are three other reservoirs within a 40-mile radius of San Angelo: **Twin Buttes Reservoir** (✆ **325/657-4206**), located immediately west of Lake Nasworthy; **Lake E. V. Spence** (✆ **432/267-6341**), known for its striped bass, situated 35 miles north of San Angelo via Tex. 208 and Tex. 158; and **Lake O. H. Ivie** (✆ **432/267-6341**), the largest body of water in the region at nearly 20,000 surface acres, located 40 miles east of the city via farm roads 765 and 2134.

**GOLF** The 7,171-yard **Quicksand Golf Course,** 2305 Pulliam St. (✆ **325/482-8337;** www.quicksandsanangelo.com), is one of Texas's best (and toughest) 18-hole courses, with greens fees around $30 to $40, cart included. There's also the 18-hole **Riverside Hills Golf Course,** 900 W. 29th St. (✆ **325/653-6130**), with greens fees of $21 to $27, cart included.

**HIKING** The top hiking area in the region is **San Angelo State Park,** with 50 miles of trails. The trails are easy to difficult, with the loops between the north and south shores and the hike to the **Highland Range Scenic Lookout** (less than a mile) being the most popular.

**MOUNTAIN BIKING** The most popular mountain biking spots in the San Angelo area are the trails at **San Angelo State Park** and around **Twin Buttes Reservoir.** Bike rentals are not available in town.

## Spectator Sports

The **San Angelo Colts** (✆ **325/942-6587;** www.sanangelocolts.com) play in the AA Central Baseball League from early May to early September at Foster Field, 1600 University Ave. Single-game tickets are $6 to $9. The **San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo Association** (✆ **325/653-7785;** www.sanangelorodeo.com) organizes several annual roping and rodeo events.

## Shopping

**Historic Concho Avenue,** downtown between Oakes and Chadbourne streets, is a melting pot of boutiques, jewelers, and antiques shops. Among its highlights are **J. Wilde's,** 20 E. Concho Ave. (✆ **325/655-0878**), a boutique with fashions and furnishings best described as Western chic (which doesn't quite do them justice); and **Legend Jewelers,** 18 E. Concho Ave. (✆ **888/655-4367** or 325/653-0112; www.legendjewelers.com), purveyors of the luminous concho pearl. The top shopping center is **Sunset Mall,** 4001 Sunset Dr., at Loop 306 (✆ **325/949-1947**).

San Angelo is home to a vibrant arts community, typified by the Texas hippie vibe at the **Old Chicken Farm Art Center** ★, 2505 N. Martin Luther King Blvd. (✆ **325/653-4936;** www.chickenfarmartcenter.com), a local landmark since 1971. Formerly an abandoned chicken farm, this funky artist's compound is home to 12 studios that are open at various times, displaying a wide range of pottery, metalwork, and paintings. The main **StarKeeper Gallery** houses the contemporary handmade ceramics of Roger Allen, the center's founder and proprietor; it's open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 5pm. The Art Center hosts resident artist's openings on the first Saturday of each month. There's also an on-site B&B, the **Inn at the Art Center** (see below).



## WHERE TO STAY

San Angelo has a nice variety of lodging available, with a handful of B&Bs and numerous chain motels and hotels. Most of the properties are located along Bryant Boulevard or near the convention center on Rio Concho Drive. Of the chains, I recommend **Holiday Inn Express,** 4613 Houston Harte Expwy. (✆ **888/465-4329** or 325/223-2200), with double rates of $109 to $119.

**Inn at the Art Center** ★ (Finds) If you like your B&B a bit on the unusual side, look no further. In place of Victorian architecture and antiques, you'll find rooms in what once were chicken coops and feed silos at the Old Chicken Farm Art Center (see "Shopping," above). My favorite: the Artist's Loft, situated within two cylindrical silos (the bedroom in one, a sitting area and bathroom in the other) connected via arched doorways and decorated with interesting murals and mosaics. There are also the themed Santa Fe and French rooms in the old coop, as well as a nicely stocked guest kitchen. Outside, you can get a firsthand look at artists at work or relax in one of the many shady nooks and crannies on the property, including a sculpture-laden courtyard and a covered patio. The restaurant, the **Silo House** (✆ **325/658-3333**), serves prix-fixe dinners by reservation on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings.

2503 Martin Luther King Blvd., San Angelo, TX 76903. ✆ **866/557-5337** or 325/659-3836. www.innattheartcenter.com. 3 units. $90–$110 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant. *In room:* A/C, cable TV/VCR, complimentary Wi-Fi, coffeemaker.

**Inn of the Conchos** (Value) Located on the north side of town, this solid property is reliable and convenient, and a good deal. While the inn's not going to win any awards

for seclusion, the rooms are surprisingly quiet for their location on the main drag, and they are nicely outfitted with amenities and well-maintained. The property has an outdoor pool to beat the summer heat, and a bar and grill located in the parking lot to make for an easy overnight stopover for the cross-Texas traveler.

2021 N. Bryant Blvd., San Angelo, TX 76903. ✆ **800/621-6041** or 325/653-2811. Fax 325/653-7560. www.inn-of-the-conchos.com. 123 units. $70 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; outdoor Jacuzzi. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, complimentary Wi-Fi, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, iron.

### Camping

The best campgrounds are at **San Angelo State Park** (✆ **325/949-4757**) and **Spring Creek Marina and RV Park** (✆ **800/500-7801** or 325/944-3850) at Lake Nasworthy. See "Outdoor Activities," above.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Armenta's** (Finds) TEX-MEX The proprietors of this festive eatery did not hold back one iota when it came to decoration, transforming a once-standard diner into a feast for the eyes with an armada of colorful parrot sculptures, strings of chile-pepper lights, and Mexican pottery. They don't hold back with the first-rate food, either, which is every bit as spicy as the scenery. Specialties include *enchiladas veracruzanas* with a creamy jalapeño sauce; fiery *guiso,* sautéed beef with onions, tomatoes, and peppers; and the *camarones a la diabla,* shrimp spiced for the most inflammable of taste buds. The homemade salsa packs a similar punch.

1325 S. Oakes St. (1 mile south of downtown). ✆ **325/653-1954.** Breakfast tacos $1–$2; lunch and dinner main courses $6–$12. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–10pm. Closed major holidays.

**Miss Hattie's Café and Saloon** STEAKS/SEAFOOD Named after the infamous proprietor of one of San Angelo's now-defunct bordellos, Miss Hattie's is one of the city's culinary standouts. Housed in a brick edifice that dates from 1884, the dining room is full of Victorian frills and antiques, with lace-sheathed tables under the original pressed-tin ceiling. The cuisine is a nice match for the atmosphere: tender steaks, daily seafood specials, salads, and pastas. My recommendation: Start with the chicken and corn fritters as an appetizer and move on to the Southwestern Carpetbagger (a rib-eye stuffed with spiced crabmeat) for the main course. The lunch menu sports a nice selection of gourmet sandwiches and salads and heartier fare such as meatloaf and chicken with dumplings.

26 E. Concho Ave. ✆ **325/653-0570.** www.misshatties.com. Main courses $6–$11 lunch, $10–$30 dinner. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–9pm; Fri–Sat 11am–10pm.

## SAN ANGELO AFTER DARK

San Angelo has a strong performing arts culture for a city its size. The **San Angelo Symphony** performs about a half-dozen classical and pops shows a year at various venues (✆ **325/658-5877;** www.sanangelosymphony.org). Single tickets are usually $20 for adults and $6 to $8 for children and students. The **Angelo Civic Theatre,** 1936 Sherwood Way (✆ **325/949-4400;** www.angelocivictheatre.com), the oldest community theater in the state, produces about five musicals, comedies, and dramas a year at its 230-seat playhouse. Tickets run $10 to $12. The city is also home to the **Cactus Music Series** (✆ **325/653-6793;** www.sanangeloarts.com) at the historic Cactus Hotel, 36 E. Twohig Ave.

# 5 DEL RIO & AMISTAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA ★

156 miles S of San Angelo; 154 miles W of San Antonio; 268 miles NW of Corpus Christi; 392 miles SW of Dallas

## ESSENTIALS

### Getting There

Del Rio is located at the junction of U.S. highways 90 and 277/377, along the U.S.–Mexico border. The **Amtrak** station is at 100 N. Main St. (✆ **800/872-2745;** www.amtrak.com), along the Sunset Limited route.

### Visitor Information

The **Del Rio Chamber of Commerce,** 1915 Veterans Blvd., Del Rio, TX 78840 (✆ **800/889-8149** or 830/775-3551; www.drchamber.com), operates a visitor center and can mail information before your trip. In Ciudad Acuña, **OCV Acuña** (✆ **877/717-9966;** www.ocvacuna.com) is your best source of tourism information and advice.

**FAST FACTS** **Val Verde Regional Medical Center,** 801 Bedell Ave. (✆ **830/775-8566;** www.vvrmc.org), has a 24-hour emergency room. The **post office,** 2001 N. Bedell Ave., is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm, Saturday from 9 to 11am.

### The Top Attractions

In addition to the attractions discussed below, there are a number of handsome **historic buildings** in Del Rio. A free brochure that describes and locates some three dozen buildings constructed between 1869 and 1929 is available at the chamber of commerce's visitor center (see "Visitor Information," above). **San Felipe Springs** offers a nice walk along crystal-clear water; the best access point is at the **Creekwalk** at Moore Park, Calderon Boulevard and De La Rosa Street, where you'll find a spring-fed swimming pool and a small amphitheater.

Many visitors to Del Rio take an excursion across the border to **Ciudad Acuña,** a small Mexican city where you'll find a main street lined with shops offering a variety of leather goods, pottery, woven items, jewelry, and other products, plus a number of good restaurants. As with most border towns, American currency is welcome at practically all businesses in Ciudad Acuña. Driving isn't a problem, but walking is a bit of a struggle, especially on hot days. If you want to leave your car in the U.S., catch a ride with **City Taxi** (✆ **830/775-6344**). ***Note:*** Be sure to carry your passport if you cross the border. As of 2008, passports are required for reentry into the U.S.

**Alamo Village** Built by John Wayne and company for his epic 1959 film *The Alamo*—and used for dozens of Westerns since—this attraction meshes Western and Hollywood history into one fun attraction. Beyond the mock-up of the Alamo, there is an entire Wild West village, complete with a cantina (food, not beer), gift shops, and a roving herd of Texas longhorn. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, actors face off in mock gunfights and country musicians play in the cantina. Expect to spend an hour or two.

FM 674, 7 miles north of Brackettville (30 miles east of Del Rio via U.S. 90). ✆ **830/563-2580.** www.alamovillage.com. Admission $11 adults, $5 children 6–11, free for children 5 and under. Daily 9am–6pm.

**Fort Clark Springs** A notable army and cavalry post from 1852 to 1946, Fort Clark has since evolved into a unique real estate development and resort with good amenities for the traveler. There are 1,600 acres of wilderness here, populated by whitetail deer and wild turkeys, crosscut by miles of nature trails, and featuring a behemoth spring-fed swimming pool (Texas's third largest) and two golf courses. There's also a museum, a basic motel ($30–$50 for a double), and an RV park (about $22 for a site with full hookups).

U.S. 90, Brackettville (30 miles east of Del Rio). ✆ **830/563-2493.** www.fortclark.com. Free admission. Activity prices vary. Open daily.

**Val Verde Winery** Established in 1883 by Italian immigrant Frank Qualia, Val Verde Winery, the state's oldest bonded winery, is now the pride and joy of third-generation vintner Thomas Qualia. Using grapes from the adjacent vineyards and other Texas vineyards, the winery produces from six to eight varieties of wine, including its award-winning Don Luis Tawny Port, which is aged in French oak barrels for 5 years. Short, informative guided tours are available at no charge, followed or substituted by free tastings. Wines are available by the bottle (usually $10–$25). Allow 20 minutes for your visit.

100 Qualia Dr. (near its intersection with Hudson St.). ✆ **830/775-9714.** www.valverdewinery.com. Free admission. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm.

**Whitehead Memorial Museum** ★ (Kids) This above-average small-town museum really does have something for everyone. Covering more than 2 acres, exhibits include a furnished log cabin, a blacksmith shop, a 1919 American LaFrance fire engine, and the early-20th-century office of Dr. Simon Rodriguez, the community's first Hispanic physician, who is credited with delivering more than 3,000 babies in the area. The graves of Judge Roy Bean and his son Sam are also on the property. The star of the museum, however, is the fantastic Cadena Nativity—a 32×20-foot Nativity scene that contains more than 600 figurines of people and animals plus another 600-plus miniature buildings, trees, bushes, and the like. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

1308 S. Main St. ✆ **830/774-7568.** www.whiteheadmuseum.org. Admission $5 adults, $4 seniors, $3 youths 13–18, $2 children 6–12, free for children 5 and under. Tues–Sat 9am–4:30pm; Sun 1–5pm; check for possible holiday closures.

## WHERE TO STAY IN DEL RIO

Veterans Boulevard, the main drag through town (U.S. highways 90/277/377), is lined with chain motels. Choices here include **Best Western Inn of Del Rio,** 810 Veterans Blvd. (✆ **800/336-3537** or 830/775-7511); **Hampton Inn,** 2219 Bedell Ave. (✆ **830/775-9700**); and **Ramada Inn,** 2101 Veterans Blvd. (✆ **800/272-6232** or 830/775-1511), all with double rates in the $99 to $129 range. Room tax adds 13%.

**Villa Del Rio Bed & Breakfast** ★ (Finds) For anyone who appreciates the old-world ambience of a historic mansion, a bit of pampering, and a creative and tasty breakfast, Villa Del Rio is the place to stay while visiting the Del Rio area. This luxurious bed-and-breakfast is a Mediterranean-style villa—actually a mix of Italian and Mexican styles with an Alamo motif—built in 1887 that still has the beautiful original hand-painted Italian tile floors. You'll also find a series of original murals that depict the area's rich history, and a plethora of painstakingly restored details. Outside is a delightful sitting area around a tiled fountain and 2 acres of subtropical vegetation, including palm, magnolia, and century-old pecan trees.

There are three rooms on the second floor of the main house, all with queen-size beds and decorated with a mix of new and antique furnishings. The spacious and colorful Peacock Suite has a private bathroom, a screened sun porch, and a small sitting room with a daybed. The other two rooms—named for Judge Roy Bean and his unrequited beloved, Lillie Langtry—have traditional and white-wicker furniture, respectively, and share a connecting bathroom. Behind the main house and across a lawn is the Pancho Villa Adobe Cottage, with a full kitchen and room for a family.

The homemade breakfasts are hearty, Southwest-style cooking, such as jalapeño crepes served with a thick ham steak and an amazing fruit plate. Proprietor Jay J. Johnson-Castro's advice on the region's history, culture, and recreation is hearty, too.

123 Hudson Dr., Del Rio, TX 78840. ✆ **800/995-1887** or 830/768-1100. Fax 830/768-0768. www.villadelrio.com. 4 units. $95–$215 double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. Well-behaved older children welcome in the main house; all children welcome in the cottage. *In room:* A/C, complimentary Wi-Fi, no phone.

## WHERE TO DINE IN DEL RIO

As with lodging, you'll find scads of national chains located along Del Rio's Veterans Boulevard. You'll be better served (in more ways than one) by seeking out one of Del Rio's locally owned restaurants, such as **The Herald** ★, 321 S. Main St. (✆ **830/774-2845**). The former HQ for the town's daily paper, the *News-Herald,* the swankest eatery in downtown Del Rio specializes in sandwiches and soups for lunch and steaks and martinis at dinner. Also recommended is **La Hacienda,** 330 Pecan St. in Pecan Street Station (✆ **830/774-7094**), featuring Mexican fare and a popular lunch buffet.

If you want to get a true (and inexpensive) taste of the region, head south to Ciudad Acuña. (Call **City Taxi** at ✆ **830/775-6344** for a ride.) My picks: **Crosby's,** Hidalgo #195 (✆ **011-52/87-72-20-20**), a tourist-oriented restaurant and bar with great service and a place in country music history thanks to a mention in George Strait's "Blame it on Mexico"; **Manuel's,** Morelos #130 (✆ **011-52/87-72-59-15**), an upscale Mexican restaurant with good steaks and *rellenos;* **La Cabañita,** Galena #267 E. (✆ **011-52/87-72-14-67**), a fun, funky space with a menu for meat lovers; and the local favorite, **Tacos Grill,** Guerrero #1490 S. (✆ **011-52/87-72-40-41**). There's also a legendary watering hole, the **Corona Club,** 2 blocks south of the downtown crossing bridge at Hidalgo #200 (✆ **011-52/87-72-51-08**). A location in the movie *Desperado,* this classic border dive opens into a spectacular courtyard that is the best music venue in the area.

## AMISTAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA ★

A beautiful spot for boating, fishing, water-skiing, scuba diving, and swimming, this is a rare international reservoir, created by the United States and Mexico with the construction of a 6-mile-long dam across the Rio Grande at the international border. Amistad Reservoir—*amistad* is Spanish for *friendship*—provides electric generation, water storage, flood control, and, most important to anglers and watersports enthusiasts, a huge lake as a U.S. National Recreation Area.

The water here is a beautiful blue color, caused by the lake bed's limestone character and lack of loose soil. The 67,000-acre lake is actually at the confluence of three rivers, and runs 74 miles up the Rio Grande, 24 miles up the Devils River, and 14 miles up the Pecos River. The shoreline measures 890 miles: 540 miles in Texas and the rest in Mexico.

There are about a dozen boat ramps spread throughout the recreation area, with three developed boat launching areas. **Diablo East** is 10 miles northwest of Del Rio via U.S. 90, **Rough Canyon** is 23 miles north of Del Rio via U.S. 90 and U.S. 277/377, and

**Pecos** is 44 miles northwest of Del Rio via U.S. 90. Boat and slip rentals and sales of supplies are available at Diablo East and Rough Canyon. Motorized-boat use passes cost $4 per day or $40 per year.

At Diablo East, **Lake Amistad Marina,** HCR-3 U.S. 90, P.O. Box 420635, Del Rio, TX 78842 (✆ **800/255-5561** or 830/774-4157; www.lakeamistadresort.com), rents a variety of boats, ranging from fishing boats and runabouts costing $145 per 8-hour day to luxurious 70-foot houseboats that sleep 10 and rent for over $3,000 for a 3-day/2-night weekend in summer. Boat rentals are also available at **Rough Canyon Marina,** P.O. Box 420845, Del Rio, TX 78842 (✆ **830/775-8779**).

There is a swimming area (no lifeguards) at Governors Island, and swimming is permitted in most undeveloped areas. Water temperatures range from a chilly 54°F (12°C) in winter to a pleasant 86°F (30°C) in summer. Water-skiing is permitted in open water (away from mooring areas, channels, and swimming beaches) during daylight hours only.

American Indian peoples are believed to have come to this area about 12,000 years ago, but it was not until about 4,000 years ago, when a different group inhabited the area, that the creation of the spectacular rock art we can see today in several areas in and near the recreation area began. These pictographs—designs painted on rocks using colors created from ground iron ore and other minerals mixed with animal fat—are difficult to get to, but well worth the effort.

One of the best rock art sites is **Panther Cave,** at the confluence of the Rio Grande and Seminole Canyon, which is usually accessible by boat and a steep climb up stairs. It has numerous figures that resemble humans or animals, including what looks like a 9-foot panther. Another good site, accessible by boat at average lake levels and by a strenuous hike through tall brush at low-water levels, is **Parida Cave,** located on the Rio Grande. See also the section on Seminole Canyon State Park & Historic Site, below.

**Governors Landing Campground,** with 15 sites overlooking the lake, is the only campground with drinking water (water is available along the Diablo East entrance road, where there is also an RV dump station). **San Pedro Campground** has 21 sites, and **Spur 406** and **277 North** campgrounds each have about a dozen sites. There is also a dispersed camping area at Spur 406 with rooms for about a dozen sites. Camping is first-come, first-served, and is limited to 14 consecutive days, or 60 days in a 12-month period. Backcountry camping from boats is permitted along the lakeshore, except at marinas and other developed areas. Camping costs $4 to $8 per night.

Admission to the park, which is open 24 hours, is free. About 10 miles west of Del Rio off U.S. 90, the park visitor center, with information, a small bookstore, and a few displays, is open daily from 8am to 5pm, except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. The first lake access is about 10 miles west of the visitor center. For information, contact **Amistad National Recreation Area,** 4121 Veterans Blvd., Del Rio, TX 78840 (✆ **830/775-7491;** www.nps.gov/amis).

## Seminole Canyon State Park & Historic Site

Adjacent to Amistad National Recreation Area, about 45 miles northwest of Del Rio via U.S. 90, this state park provides opportunities to take guided hikes to see what many consider the best pictographs in North America, possibly 4,000 years old. In addition, Seminole Canyon offers a short nature trail, camping, hiking through a rugged limestone terrain, wildlife viewing and bird-watching, and a museum.

Although it is believed that humans lived in this area at the end of the last ice age, some 12,000 years ago, they left few signs of their presence. Then, about 7,000 years ago, a different culture arrived, and within 3,000 years of their arrival they began to paint

designs on sheltered rock walls. State park rangers lead hiking tours to several of the rock-art sites.

The **Fate Bell Cave Dwelling Tour** is offered Wednesday through Sunday at 10am and 3pm. Cost is $5 per person, $2 for children ages 6 to 12, and reservations are not required. This is a moderately rated 2-mile round-trip hike that leads into Seminole Canyon to a huge rock shelter where participants will see hundreds of pictographs. The state park also has two guided tours that are offered only about a half-dozen times a year, by advance reservation through the park office (see below). The 1.75-mile round-trip **Upper Canyon Tour,** which costs $12 per person and takes 2 hours, leads to a normally closed area of the park in the upper section of the canyon to see pictographs and some railroad sites from 1882; and the 8-mile round-trip **Presa Canyon Tour,** which costs $25 per person, is an all-day hike into the lower canyon to see rock-art sites that are normally off-limits to the public. The **Rock Art Foundation** (✆ **888/525-9907;** www.rockart.org) takes visitors on a 2-hour tour to the White Shaman site's hallucinogenic pictographs for $10, as well as other tours.

The park has a 6-mile round-trip **hiking/biking trail** along the top of the canyon that leads to a bluff from which you can see Panther Cave, and its namesake painted panther, across Lake Amistad (see the section on Amistad National Recreation Area, above). Bring your binoculars for a better view. The trail has little elevation change, but is rocky with little shade. No one is allowed to go down into the canyon except on guided tours.

The **Windmill Nature Trail,** just behind the visitor center/museum, is an easy, although not shaded and therefore hot, .7-mile loop. It meanders through a harsh environment of ocotillo, cactuses, yucca, juniper, Texas mountain laurel, and other desert plants to its namesake windmill—actually the remains of two windmills, one from the 1890s and one from the 1920s.

The small campground, with 31 sites, sits on an open knoll covered with mesquite, creosote bush, yucca, cactuses, and other desert plants. There are hot showers and a dump station. Sites with water only cost $12 per night and those with water and electricity cost $17 per night.

The park is open 24 hours a day year-round, except for 1 week in November and 1 week in December when it is open only to properly licensed hunters. The visitor center, with its excellent museum containing exhibits on the area's ancient inhabitants as well as its more recent history, is open daily from 8am to 5pm. Admission to the park costs $3 adults, free for children 12 and under. For information, contact **Seminole Canyon State Park & Historic Site,** P.O. Box 820, Comstock, TX 78837 (✆ **432/292-4464;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

11

# Big Bend & Guadalupe Mountains National Parks

*by Eric Peterson*

You'll find Texas's most spectacular mountain scenery, as well as absolutely wonderful opportunities for hiking and other forms of outdoor recreation, at Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains national parks. These parks also have an abundance of wildlife and both prehistoric and historic sites. Big Bend National Park is bounded by the Rio Grande, as it defines the U.S.-Mexico border, while Guadalupe Mountains National Park boasts the highest peak in Texas and a canyon that I believe has the prettiest scenery in the state, especially in the fall.

In addition to these two national parks in Texas, a third, Carlsbad Caverns National Park, is just over the state line in New Mexico. This easy side trip from Guadalupe Mountains National Park offers some of the world's most beautiful cave formations, and, if you're so inclined, the thrill of a true caving experience, as you crawl belly-to-rock through dirty, narrow, and dark underground passages.

## 1 BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ★★

Vast and wild, Big Bend National Park is a land of extremes—and a few contradictions. Its rugged terrain harbors thousands of species of plants and animals—some seen practically nowhere else on earth—and a visit here can be a hike into the sun-baked desert, a float down a majestic river through the canyons, or a trek among high mountains where bears and mountain lions rule.

Millions of years ago, an inland sea covered this area. As it dried up, sediments of sand and mud turned to rock; mountains were created and volcanoes roared. The resultant canyons and rock formations that we marvel at today—red-, orange-, yellow-, white-, and brown-hued—make for one of the most spectacular landscapes in the Southwest. This is not a fantasyland of delicate shapes and intricate carvings, like Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah, but a powerful and dominating terrain. Although the greatest natural sculptures are in the park's three major river canyons—the Santa Elena, Marsical, and Boquillas—throughout Big Bend you'll find spectacular and majestic examples of what nature can do with this mighty yet malleable building material we call rock.

Visitors to Big Bend National Park will also discover a wild, rugged wilderness, populated by myriad desert and mountain plants and animals; box turtles, black-tailed jackrabbits, funny-looking javelina, powerful black bears, and mountain lions are all known to roam here. The park is considered a birder's paradise, with more bird species than at any other national park. It's also a wonderful spot to see wildflowers and the delightfully colorful display of cactus blooms.

For hikers, there are all kinds of trails, from easy walks to rugged backcountry routes that barely qualify as trails at all. There are also opportunities to let the Rio Grande do the work as it carries rafts, canoes, and kayaks among canyons carved through 1,500 feet of solid rock. Drivers of 4×4s enjoy exploring the backcountry roads, and history buffs find a number of historical attractions and cultural experiences. Because of the vastness of this park, you'll need to schedule at least 2 full days here, though 3 or 4 would be better.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Big Bend National Park is not really close to anything except the Rio Grande and Mexico. There is no public transportation to or through the park, so to get to the park you'll need a car. Park headquarters is 108 miles southeast of Alpine via Tex. 118, and 69 miles south of Marathon via U.S. 385. From El Paso, 328 miles northwest of the park, take I-10 east 121 miles to exit 140, follow U.S. 90 southeast 99 miles to Alpine, and then turn south on Tex. 118 for 108 miles to park headquarters.

There is train and bus service to Alpine, where the nearest hospital is located. For information, contact the **Alpine Chamber of Commerce** (✆ **800/561-3712** or 432/837-2326; www.alpinetexas.com).

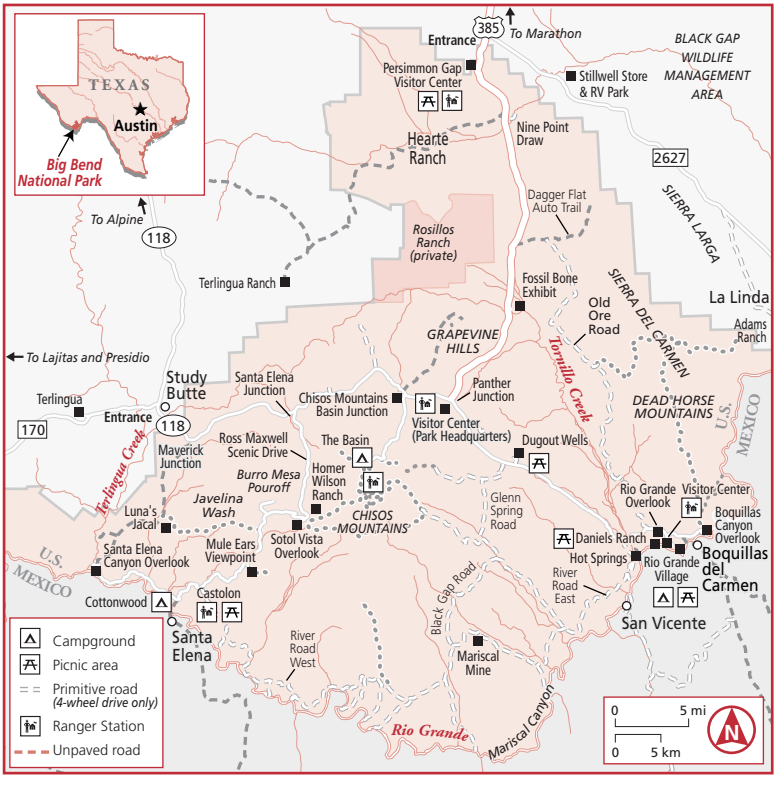
The nearest commercial airports are **Midland International** (✆ **432/560-2200;** www.flymaf.com), 235 miles north, and **Del Rio International Airport** (✆ **830/774-8538**), about 250 miles southeast. From Midland-Odessa, take I-20 west about 50 miles to exit 80 for Tex. 18, which you follow south about 50 miles to Fort Stockton. There take U.S. 385 south 125 miles through Marathon to park headquarters. From Del Rio, you take U.S. 90 west 175 miles to Marathon, and U.S. 385 south 70 miles to park headquarters.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** For advance information, contact the **Superintendent,** P.O. Box 129, Big Bend National Park, TX 79834 (✆ **432/477-2251;** www.nps.gov/bibe).

Books, maps, and videos are available from the **Big Bend Natural History Association** (✆ **432/477-2236;** www.bigbendbookstore.org). The free park newspaper, *The Big Bend Paisano,* published seasonally by the National Park Service, is a great source of current information on special programs, suggested hikes, kids' activities, and local facilities, with telephone numbers inside and outside the park.

There are five visitor centers in the park: **Panther Junction Visitor Center** (open year-round) is centrally located at park headquarters; **Persimmon Gap Visitor Center** (open year-round) is at the North Entrance to the park on U.S. 385; **Rio Grande Village Visitor Center** (open Nov–Apr) is on the river in the eastern part of the park; **Castolon** (open Nov–Apr) is near the river in the southwestern end of the park; and **Chisos Basin Visitor Center** (open year-round) is in the Chisos Mountains in the middle of the park, at 5,401 feet in elevation. All visitor centers provide information, backcountry permits, books, and maps, and have exhibits; there is an impressive display on mountain lions at Chisos Basin and informative exhibits focusing on the park's cultural history at Castolon. Bulletin boards with schedules of ranger programs, notices of animal sightings, and other information are located at each of the visitor centers.

**FEES, REGULATIONS & PERMITS** Entry into the park for up to a week costs $20 per passenger vehicle, and $5 per person on foot or bicycle. A $10 camping permit, available at any visitor center, is required for all backcountry camping and good for 2 weeks;




permits are also required for all river-float trips (see "Camping" and "River Running," later in this chapter).

Wood or ground fires are prohibited in the park, and caution is advised when using camp stoves, charcoal grills, and cigarettes. Smoking is prohibited on all trails in the Chisos Basin. Check at the visitor centers for current drought conditions and any restrictions that may be in effect when you visit. Horses are not permitted on any paved roads in the park.

**WHEN TO GO** Weather here is generally mild to hot, although because of the vast range of elevations—from about 1,800 feet at the eastern end of Boquillas Canyon to 7,825 feet on Emory Peak in the Chisos Mountains—conditions can vary greatly throughout the park at any given time. Essentially, the higher you go, the cooler and wetter you can expect it to be, although no section of the park gets a lot of precipitation.

Summers are hot, often well over 100°F (38°C) in the desert in May and June, and afternoon thunderstorms are common July through September. Winters are usually mild, although temperatures occasionally drop below freezing, and light snow is possible, especially in the Chisos Mountains. Fall and spring are usually warm and pleasant.

Average annual visitation is just over 300,000. Although the park is relatively uncrowded much of the year, there are several periods when lodging and campgrounds are full: college spring break (usually the second and third week in Mar), Easter weekend, Thanksgiving weekend, and the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. Park visitation is generally highest in March and April, and lowest in August and September.

Although the park's visitor centers, campgrounds, and other developed facilities may be taxed during the busy season, visitors can still be practically alone simply by seeking out lesser-used hiking trails. Those seeking solitude should discuss their hiking skills and expectations with rangers, who can offer suggestions on the best areas to escape the crowds.

**SAFETY** Watch for wild animals along the roads, especially at night, when they may be blinded by your vehicle's headlights and stunned into standing still in the middle of the road. Feeding wildlife is strictly prohibited—not only to minimize the risk of injuries to park visitors but also because it's bad for the animals.

**The Basin Road Scenic Drive** into the Chisos Mountains has sharp curves and steep grades and is not recommended for trailers longer than 20 feet or motor homes longer than 24 feet. The **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** to Castolon is fine for most RVs and trailers but might present a problem for those with insufficient power to handle the steep grade. These roads require extra caution by all users—drivers of motor vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists alike.

Desert heat can be dangerous. Hikers should carry at least 1 gallon of water per person per day; wear a hat, long pants, and long sleeves; and use a good sunscreen. Don't depend on springs as water sources, and avoid hiking in the middle of the day in summer. Early mornings and evenings are best. Talk to rangers about your plans before heading out; they can help you plan a hike in accordance with your ability and time frame. They can also advise you on expected weather conditions—sudden summer thunderstorms are common and can cause flash flooding in usually dry washes and canyons.

Swimming is not recommended in the Rio Grande, even though it may look tantalizingly inviting on a hot summer day. Waste materials and waterborne microorganisms have been found in the river and can cause serious illness. Also, strong undercurrents, deep holes, and sharp rocks in shallow water are common.

**RANGER PROGRAMS & SPECIAL EVENTS** Park ranger naturalists offer a variety of programs year-round. Illustrated evening programs take place at the 5,400-foot **Chisos Basin amphitheater** year-round. From November to April, evening programs are offered regularly in the amphitheater at **Rio Grande Village** and occasionally at Cottonwood Campground. Subjects include the park's geology, plants, animals, and human history. I especially like the ranger-led **nature walks** ★★, and rangers also occasionally lead driving tours. Workshops are also planned, on subjects such as adobe construction or photography. Look for weekly schedules on the bulletin boards scattered about the park. **Personal ranger-guided tours** are also available for $35 an hour with a 4-hour minimum. Call ✆ **432/477-1108** for reservations or to check on availability.

The park has a **Junior Ranger Program** for children of all ages. Kids learn about the park through a variety of activities, and earn stickers, certificates, badges, and patches. Pick up Junior Ranger Activity Books ($2) at any visitor center.

The **Big Bend Natural History Association** (see "Visitor Information," above) offers a variety of seminars. Cost is about $100 per day and most seminars are for 1 or 2 days. Subjects could include black bears, archaeology, bats, birds, cactuses, photography, and wildflowers.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### Exploring the Highlights by Car

The park has several paved roads. In addition, there are several unimproved roads requiring high clearance or 4×4 vehicles.

There are two scenic drives in the park, both with sharp curves and steep inclines and not recommended for certain RVs and trailers (see "Safety," above).

The 7-mile **Chisos Basin Drive,** which takes at least a half-hour, climbs up Green Gulch to Panther Pass before dropping down into the basin. Near the pass there are some sharp curves, and parts of the road are at a 10% grade. The views are wonderful any time of the year, and particularly when the wildflowers dot the meadows, hills, and roadsides. The best months for wildflowers are March and April, and even later on the highest mountain trails.

When you've breathed your fill of clear mountain air, head back down and turn west toward the **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** through the Chihuahuan Desert and finally to the Rio Grande. This drive, which will take an hour or so plus stops, winds through the desert on the west side of the Chisos Mountains, providing a different perspective. Afterward, it passes through Castolon, and then continues along and above the river to **Santa Elena Canyon.** Here you should park and hike the trail, which climbs above the river, offering great views into the steep, narrow canyon (see "Hiking," below).

Another worthwhile drive, recommended for all vehicles, begins at **Panther Junction Visitor Center** and goes to Rio Grande Village. Allow a half-day. From the visitor center, head southeast through the desert toward the high mountains that form the skyline in the distance. The first half of the drive passes through desert grasses, finally making a comeback after severe overgrazing in the decades before the establishment of the park in 1944. Recovery is slow in this harsh climate, but it is beginning to revegetate.

As the elevation gradually decreases, you progress farther into the desert, and the grasses give way to lechuguilla and ocotillo, cactuses, and other arid-climate survivors. Off to the south is the long, rather flat **Chilicotal Mountain,** named for the chilicote, or mescal-bean bushes, growing near its base. The chilicote's poisonous red bean is used in Mexico to kill rats. Several miles farther the River Road turns off and heads southwest toward Castolon, more than 50 miles away. This is a primitive road for high-clearance vehicles only.

If you feel adventurous, take the **Hot Springs** turnoff about a mile beyond the Tornillo Creek Bridge. The road follows a rough wash to a point overlooking the convergence of Tornillo Creek and the Rio Grande. A trail along the riverbank leads to several springs. The foundation of a bathhouse is a remnant of the town of Hot Springs, which thrived here about 20 years before the park was established.

Back on the paved road, you'll soon pass through a short tunnel in the limestone cliff, beyond which is a parking area for a short trail to a viewpoint overlooking **Rio Grande Village.** It's just a short drive from here to Rio Grande Village, your destination, where you can take a .75-mile nature trail ending at a high point above the Rio Grande, offering terrific views up and down the river.

### Historic Sites

There is evidence that prehistoric American Indians and later Apaches, Kiowas, and Comanches occupied this area. Throughout the park you can find **petroglyphs, pictographs,** and other signs of early human presence, including ruins of **stone shelters.** There are pictographs along the Hot Spring Trail (see "Hiking," below), and along the

### Tips Don't Cross the Rio Grande!

Increased national security following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks has put a stop to the once-popular informal trips to Mexico that many visitors to Big Bend National Park used to make. Although there are no authorized border crossing points within the national park, for years Mexican citizens would use rowboats to ferry park visitors across the Rio Grande to several small Mexican villages, where the Americans could shop and eat genuine Mexican food. But Homeland Security officials have announced that those informal border crossings are no longer permitted, and anyone entering the United States from Mexico in the park is subject to a fine of up to $5,000 and imprisonment of up to 1 year.

river. Watch for **mortar holes** scattered throughout the park, sometimes a foot deep, where Indians would grind seeds or mesquite beans.

Also within the park boundaries are the remains of several early-20th-century communities, a mercury mine, and projects by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The **Castolon Historic District,** located in the southwest section of the park just off the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, includes the remains of homes and other buildings, many stabilized by the National Park Service, that were constructed in the early 1900s by Mexican-American farmers, Anglo settlers, and the U.S. Army. The first is the **Alvino House,** the oldest surviving adobe structure in the park, dating from 1901. Nearby is **La Harmonia Store,** built in 1920 to house cavalry troops during the Mexican Revolution, but never actually used by soldiers because the war ended. Two civilians converted it into a general store and then purchased the building, calling it La Harmonia for the harmony and peaceful relations they hoped to encourage among area residents. The store continues to operate, selling snacks, groceries, and other necessities.

The village of **Glenn Springs,** located in the southeast section of the park and accessible by dirt road off the main park highway, owes its creation to having a reliable water source in an otherwise arid area. It was named for rancher H. E. Glenn, who grazed horses in the area until Indians killed him in the 1880s. By 1916 there were several ranches, a factory that produced wax from the candelilla plant, a store, a post office, and a residential village divided into two sections—one for the Anglos and the other for the Mexicans. But then Mexican bandit revolutionaries crossed the border and attacked, killing and wounding a number of people, looting the store, and partially destroying the wax factory. Within 3 years, the community was virtually deserted. Today, the spring still flows, and you can see the remains of several adobe buildings and other structures.

Remains of a small health resort can be seen at the **Hot Springs,** accessible by hiking trail or dirt road, along the Rio Grande west of Rio Grande Village in the park's southeast section. Construction of the resort began in 1909 under the auspices of J. O. Langford, who was forced to leave during the Mexican Revolution. However, Langford returned and completed the project in the 1920s, advertising the Hot Springs as "The Fountain of Youth that Ponce de León failed to find." Today you'll see the ruins of a general store/post office, other buildings, and a foundation that fills with natural mineral water, at about 105°F (41°C), creating an almost natural hot tub—except when the river rises above 3 feet in depth.

To get to the **Marsical Mine,** you will likely need a four-wheel-drive or high-clearance vehicle. Located in the south-central part of the park, it is most easily accessed by River Road East, which begins 5 miles west of Rio Grande Village. The mine operated on and off between 1900 and 1943, producing 1,400 76-pound flasks of mercury, which was almost one-quarter of the total amount of mercury produced in the United States during that time. Mining buildings, homes, the company store, a kiln, foundations, and other structures remain in what is now a National Historic District.

Also in the park you can see some excellent examples of the work done by the **Civilian Conservation Corps** in the 1930s and early 1940s. These include stone culverts along the Basin Road, the Lost Mine Trail, and several buildings, including some stone-and-adobe cottages that are still in use at the Chisos Mountains Lodge.

## Outdoor Adventures

Local companies that provide equipment rentals and a variety of guided adventures in both the park and the general area include **Desert Sports** (✆ **888/989-6900** or 432/371-2727; www.desertsportstx.com), located on FM 170, 5 miles west of the junction of FM 170 and Tex. 118, and **Far Flung Outdoor Center** ★, FM 170 (P.O. Box 377), Terlingua, TX (✆ **800/839-7238** or 432/371-2633; www.ffoc.net).

### Bird-Watching & Wildlife Viewing ★★

There is an absolutely phenomenal variety of wildlife at Big Bend National Park. About 450 species of birds can be found here over the course of the year—that's more than at any other national park and nearly half of all those found in North America. At latest count there were also about 75 species of mammals, close to 70 species of reptiles and amphibians, and more than three dozen species of fish.

This is the only place in the United States where you'll find the Mexican long-nosed bat, listed by the federal government as an endangered species. Other **endangered species** that make their homes in the park include the black-capped vireo and a tiny fish, the Big Bend gambusia, which I hope prospers and multiplies because its favorite food is mosquito larvae.

Birders consider Big Bend National Park a key bird-watching destination, especially for those looking for some of America's more unusual **birds.** Among the park's top bird-watching spots are Rio Grande Village and Cottonwood campgrounds, the Chisos Basin, and the Hot Springs. Species to watch for include the colorful golden-fronted woodpecker, which can often be seen year-round among the cottonwood trees along the Rio Grande; and the rare colima warbler, whose range in the United States consists solely of the Chisos Mountains at Big Bend National Park. Among the hundreds of other birds that call the park home (at least part of the year) are scaled quail, spotted sandpipers, white-winged doves, greater roadrunners, lesser nighthawks, white-throated swifts, black-chinned and broad-tailed hummingbirds, acorn woodpeckers, northern flickers, western wood-pewees, ash-throated flycatchers, tufted titmice, bushtits, cactus and canyon wrens, loggerhead shrikes, Wilson's warblers, and Scott's orioles.

**Mammals** you may see in the park include desert cottontails, black-tailed jack rabbits, rock squirrels, Texas antelope squirrels, Merriam's kangaroo rats, coyotes, gray foxes, raccoons, striped skunks, javelina (wild desert pigs), mule deer, and white-tailed deer. There are occasional sightings of mountain lions, usually called panthers here, in the Green Gulch and Chisos Basin areas. Four attacks on humans have occurred at the park, with no fatalities. Black bears, which were frequently seen in the area until about 1940, were mostly killed off by area ranchers who saw them as a threat to their livestock. However,

with the protection provided by national park status, they began to return in the mid-1980s and have now established a small population.

There are a number of **reptiles** in the park, including some poisonous snakes, such as diamondback, Mojave, rock, and black-tailed rattlesnakes, plus the Trans-Pecos copperhead. Fortunately, it is unlikely you will see a rattler or copperhead, since they avoid both the heat of the day and busy areas. You are more apt to encounter nonpoisonous western coachwhips, which are often seen speeding across trails and roadways. Sometimes called "red racers," they're reddish, sometimes bright red, and among America's fastest snakes. Other nonpoisonous snakes that inhabit the park include Texas whipsnakes, spotted night snakes, southwestern black-headed snakes, and black-necked garter snakes.

Among the **lizards** you may see scurrying along desert roads and trails is the southwestern earless lizard—adult males are green with black and white chevrons on their lower sides, and often curl their black-striped tails over their backs. You'll also see various whiptail lizards in the desert, but in the canyons and higher in the mountains, watch for the crevice spiny lizard, which is covered with scales and has a dark collar. Although rare, there are also **western box turtles** in the park, as well as several types of more common water turtles.

## Hiking ★★★

Big Bend National Park is a wonderful park for hikers, with a wide variety of trails, most of which are easy or moderate. There are a number of short, easy interpretative nature walks, with either booklets available at the trail heads or signs along the trail. One example is the **Panther Path,** outside the Panther Junction Visitor Center, which is 50 yards round-trip and offers a walk through a garden of cactuses and other desert plants. I also enjoy the **Window View Trail,** which is a .3-mile round-trip and is accessible via the Chisos Basin Trailhead. This level, paved, and wheelchair-accessible self-guided nature trail runs along a low hill and offers beautiful sunset views through the Window, a V-shaped opening in the mountains to the west. The **Rio Grande Village Nature Trail** ★ .75-mile round-trip starts at the southeast corner of Rio Grande Village Campground across from site 18 and is a good choice for sunrise and sunset views. It climbs from the surprisingly lush river flood plain about 125 feet into desert terrain to a hilltop that offers excellent panoramic vistas.

Those who want to see historic structures should try the easy 1-mile **Hot Springs Trail,** which is at the end of an improved dirt road to Hot Springs, off the road to Rio Grande Village. An interpretive booklet available at the trail head describes the sights, including a historic health resort and homestead (see "Historic Sites," above), along this loop. Fairly substantial ruins remain of a general store/post office, other buildings, and a foundation that fills with natural mineral water at about 105°F (41°C), creating an inviting hot tub. Also along the trail are pictographs left by ancient Indians, and panoramic views of the Rio Grande and Mexico.

Among other easy hikes is the **Tuff Canyon Trail** (.75 mile round-trip), which is accessed from the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, 5 miles south of the Mule Ears Overlook access road. This walk leads into a narrow canyon, carved from soft volcanic rock called tuff, and offers several canyon overlooks. The 1.6-mile **Chisos Basin Loop Trail** (access at the Chisos Basin trail head) is a fairly easy walk that climbs about 350 feet into a pretty meadow and leads to an overlook that offers good views of the park's mountains, including Emory Peak, the highest point in the park at 7,825 feet; more adventurous hikers can continue here to the breathtaking South Rim for a 12-mile round-trip. The easy **Grapevine Hills Trail,** which is 2.2 miles round-trip, begins about 6 miles down the unpaved

Grapevine Hills Road. It has an elevation change of about 240 feet as it follows a sandy wash through the desert, among massive granite boulders, ending at a picturesque balancing rock.

Among shorter, moderately rated trails, I heartily recommend the .8-mile one-way **Santa Elena Canyon Trail** ★★★, which you'll find at the end of Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. You may get your feet wet crossing a broad creek on this trail, which also takes you up a series of steep steps; it's one of the most scenic short trails in the park, leading along the canyon wall, with good views of rafters on the Rio Grande, and down among the boulders along the river. Interpretive signs describe the canyon environment. Beware of flash flooding as you cross the Terlingua Creek, and skip this trail if the creek is running swiftly. Another good moderate hike is the **Boquillas Canyon Trail** ★, which is 1.4 miles round-trip and starts at the end of Boquillas Canyon Road. This hike begins by climbing a low hill and then drops down to the Rio Grande, ending near a shallow cave and huge sand dune. There are good views of the scenic canyon and the Mexican village of Boquillas, across the Rio Grande.

Among longer trails, I suggest the moderately rated 3.8-mile round-trip **Mule Ears Spring Trail** ★, which you'll find at the Mule Ears Overlook parking area along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. This relatively flat desert trail crosses several arroyos and then follows a wash most of the way to Mule Ears Spring. It offers great views of unusual rock formations, such as the Mule Ears, and ends at a historic ranch house and rock corral. At 4 miles round-trip, the moderate **Pine Canyon Trail** takes you from desert grasslands dotted with sotols into a pretty canyon with dense stands of pinyon, juniper, oak, and finally bigtooth maple and ponderosa pine. At the higher elevations (it climbs 1,000 ft.), you'll also see Texas madrones—evergreen trees with smooth reddish bark that is shed each summer. At the end of the trail is a 200-foot cliff, which becomes a picturesque waterfall after heavy rains. This trail is located at the end of unpaved Pine Canyon Road (check on road conditions before going).

## Horseback Riding

Horses are permitted on most dirt roads and many park trails (check with rangers for specifics), and may be kept overnight at many of the park's primitive campsites, although not at the developed campgrounds. The **Government Springs Campsite,** located 3 1/2 miles from Panther Junction, is a primitive campsite with a corral that accommodates up to eight horses. It can be reserved up to 10 weeks in advance (✆ **432/477-2241**). Those riding horses in the park must get free stock-use permits, which should be obtained in person up to 24 hours in advance at any of the park's visitor centers.

Although there are no commercial outfitters offering guided rides in the park as of this writing, there are opportunities for rides just outside the park on private land, such as nearby Big Bend Ranch State Park and across the river in Mexico. **Lajitas Stables** (✆ **800/887-4331** or 432/371-2212; www.lajitasstables.com) offers a variety of guided trail rides, lasting from 2 hours to all day to 5 days. Some trips follow canyon trails; others visit ancient Indian camps and ghost towns. Typical rates are $70 for 2 hours, $100 for 4 hours, and $150 for a full day; multiday trips are usually about $150 per day, and include all meals and camping equipment, as well as the horse. There are also combination riding/rafting expeditions.

## Mountain Biking

Bikes are not permitted on hiking trails, but are allowed on the park's many established dirt roads. Mountain bikes are available for rent from **Desert Sports** (see above), at a cost of $35 per day, $150 for 5 to 7 days, and $20 for each additional day after 7 days. The

company also offers 1-day and multiday guided trips, including a combination hiking/mountain-biking/float trip in the park—3 days for $550.

### River Running ★

The Rio Grande follows the southern edge of the park for 118 miles, and extends another 127 miles downstream as a designated Wild and Scenic River. The river offers mostly calm float trips, but it does have a few sections of rough white water during high-water times. It can usually be run in a raft, canoe, or kayak. You can either bring your own equipment or rent equipment near the park (none is available in the park), but for novices it's safest to take a trip with one of several river guides approved by the National Park Service.

Those planning trips on their own must obtain $10 permits at a park visitor center, in person only and no more than 24 hours before the trip. Permits for the lower canyons of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River are available at the **Persimmon Gap Visitor Center,** and a self-service permit station located there when the visitor center itself is closed. Permits for the section of river through Santa Elena Canyon can also be obtained at the **Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center,** 1 mile east of the community of Lajitas, Texas, about 20 miles from the park's west entrance. Park rangers, however, strongly advise that everyone planning a river trip check with them beforehand to get the latest river conditions. A river-running booklet with additional information is available at park visitor centers and from the **Big Bend Natural History Association** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter).

Rafts, inflatable kayaks, and canoes can be rented from **Desert Sports** (✆ **888/989-6900** or 432/371-2727; www.desertsportstx.com). Rafts cost $30 per person per day (three-person minimum) with discounts for trips longer than 4 days; inflatable kayaks cost $40 per day for one person and $50 per day for two people; and canoes cost $50 per day, with discounts for multiday rentals. The company also provides shuttle services and offers guided 1-day and multiday canoe and raft trips, where you can either grab a paddle and take an active role, or sit back and let your boatman and the river do the work. Typical prices are $315 per person for 2 days on the river through Santa Elena Canyon; and $550 per person for 3 days on the river through Marsical Canyon, considered the most remote canyon in the national park. Desert Sports also offers trips that combine a float trip with hiking or mountain biking. Also see "Mountain Biking," above.

Another company that provides guided trips on the Rio Grande is **Big Bend River Tours** (✆ **800/545-4240** or 432/371-3033; www.bigbendrivertours.com), which has daily raft trips year-round. Trips range from a delightful half-day float for about $72 per person to 10-day excursions for about $2,000 per person. Among the company's most popular trips is the 21-mile float through beautiful Santa Elena Canyon, which offers spectacular scenery and wonderful serenity, plus the excitement of a challenging section of rapids called the Rockslide. There are also often opportunities to see wildlife. The canyon can be explored on a day trip (about $140 per person), a 2-day trip (about $310 per person), or a 3-day trip (about $450 per person), with varying rates based on the number of people making the trip. The longer trips include a stop in a side canyon with waterfalls and peaceful swimming holes. Big Bend River Tours also offers guided canoe and inflatable kayak trips, provides a shuttle service, and rents equipment.

The third outfitter on the Rio Grande in the Terlingua/Study Butte area is **Far Flung Outdoor Center** (✆ **800/839-7238** or 432/371-2633; www.ffoc.net), offering raft and canoe trips for $130 per person for a full-day canyon float. Multiday trips range from $325 per person for an overnight trip to $1,800 for a 10-day expedition. The company also offers jeep and ATV tours of the region.

## WHERE TO STAY

This is an isolated area, so don't expect to find your favorite chain motel or restaurant right around the corner. Make lodging reservations well in advance, especially in winter—the high season here—when rates are highest.

### In the Park

**Chisos Mountains Lodge ★** The best place to stay while exploring Big Bend, Chisos Mountains Lodge offers a variety of accommodations ranging from simple motel rooms to my preference, the historic stone cottages. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, the six delightful cottages have a rustic feel that seems right for a national park setting. They have stone floors, wooden furniture, three double beds, and covered porches. Book as far in advance as possible.

The lodge units, which are also a bit on the rustic side, have one double and one single bed, wood furnishings, and painted brick walls with Western and/or Southwestern art. The lodge's motel rooms are small and simply decorated, with two double beds and terrific views of the Chisos Mountains. The Casa Grande Motor Lodge, also part of the Chisos Mountains Lodge, offers spacious and more modern motel rooms, attractively furnished, with two beds and private balconies. The restaurant here serves three meals a day, including a breakfast buffet. All rooms are nonsmoking.

Chisos Basin, Big Bend National Park, TX 79834-9999. ✆ **432/477-2291.** Fax 432/477-2352. www.chisosmountainslodge.com. 72 units. $120–$160 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C (in motel and Casa Grande units), fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

### The Study Butte–Terlingua Area

Just outside the national park's west entrance, this is the closest community to the park with lodging and other services. Here you'll find the **Big Bend Motor Inn,** at the junction of Tex. 118 and FM 170 (P.O. Box 336), Terlingua, TX 79852 (✆ **800/848-BEND** [848-2363] or 432/371-2218; www.foreverresorts.com), offering simple but comfortable and well-maintained modern motel rooms, with rates of $89 to $135 for doubles, and about $149 to $199 for kitchenette 2-bedroom apartments. A restaurant and convenience store are on-site. In Terlingua Ghost Town, the formerly abandoned **Holiday Hotel,** behind the Terlingua Trading Company (✆ **432/371-2234;** www.historic-terlingua.com), has been nicely restored and features six rooms with double rates of $125 to $175. The proprietors also have numerous historic homes for rent in the area.

About 20 miles west of Terlingua, **Lajitas,** HC 70 (✆ **877/525-4827** or 432/424-5000; www.lajitas.com), offers double rooms and suites for $149 to over $300, including a pool and a wing of stylish rooms in a former cavalry post once under the command of "Black Jack" Pershing.

**La Posada Milagro ★** Built on the site of a former ruin that is now incorporated into the structure, La Posada Milagro overlooks Terlingua Ghost Town and is a terrific place to hang your hat in the Big Bend region. Featuring distinctive West Texas touches—thatched ceilings, corner hearths, and great patio seating areas—three smaller rooms share a full bathroom and a half bathroom, and a fourth room is the Chisos Honeymoon Suite, larger, with a private bathroom. Also available is a nearby guesthouse, La Casita.

100 Milagro Rd., Terlingua Ghost Town, Terlingua, TX 79852. ✆ **432/371-3044.** 5 units, 3 with shared bathroom, including 1 guesthouse. $145–$195 double with shared bathroom; $210 double with private bathroom; $350 guesthouse. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Guest laundry; kitchen. *In room:* A/C, complimentary Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, no phone.

**Ten Bits Ranch ★** Located about 10 miles north of Study Butte, this isolated lodging is one of a kind, a re-creation of an old Western town, replete with boardwalks and storefronts masking the stylish guest rooms. Hosting their first guests in late 2004, the individually decorated units—the Bank, the Gunsmith, the Schoolhouse, and the General Store—are named for their corresponding storefronts, and decorated with a sense of desert chic, featuring private bathrooms and patios. The ranch is sustainable and off the grid—you can really get away from it all here. Owners Jennifer and Steve Wick are well acquainted with the Big Bend area as a former travel agent and park ranger, respectively. Steve, a paleontologist and archaeologist, offers special dinosaur excavation getaways on the ranch, which is full of fossils.

6000 N. County Rd. (P.O. Box 293), Terlingua, TX 79852. ✆ **866/371-3110.** www.tenbitsranch.com. 4 units. $129–$199 double, with a 2-night minimum stay Oct–May. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Guest kitchen. *In room:* No phone.

## Marathon

**Gage Hotel ★★** Located 50 miles north of the park boundary, the historic Gage Hotel opened in 1927 as the social hub for area ranchers and miners, but fell into shambles under the desert sun in the ensuing decades. But that period is long over: The current owners restored the old redbrick's many charms in the early 1980s, melding history and an eye for Texas chic. The historic rooms have cow-skin rugs, hardwood floors, Navajo blankets, oodles of personality; those with shared bathrooms are a bit on the smallish side, but those with private bathrooms are my personal favorites. With outdoor entrances closer to the magnificent pool and courtyards, the larger Los Portales rooms are part of an addition completed in 1992 and have adobe floors and expanded amenities (coffeemakers, phones, hair dryers, and irons). The restaurant, Café Cenizo, serves steaks and gourmet Southwestern cuisine.

U.S. 90 (P.O. Box 46), Marathon, TX 79842. ✆ **800/884-GAGE** [884-4243] or 432/386-4205. www.gagehotel.com. 39 units (9 with shared bathroom), including 1 suite and 2 guesthouses. $76 double with shared bathroom; $108–$200 double with private bathroom; $250 suite; $333–$363 guesthouse. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor heated pool; exercise room; spa; Jacuzzi; complimentary Wi-Fi (lobby only); in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, no phone.

# WHERE TO DINE

## In the Park

The restaurant at **Chisos Mountains Lodge** (see "Where to Stay," above) is your only dining option while within park boundaries.

## The Study Butte–Terlingua Area

For barbecue and steaks ($9–$15), **La Kiva,** FM 170 between Terlingua Ghost Town and then turnoff to Tex. 118 (✆ **432/371-2250**), is a watering hole on Terlingua Creek that looks like a cave, complete with fossils in the walls and tree stumps for bar stools.

**Starlight Theatre ★★** MEXICAN/NEW AMERICAN A 1930s movie palace abandoned when the mines in Terlingua went bust in the following decade, the Starlight Theatre was reborn as an eatery and watering hole in 1991. The stage is still here, but the silver screen takes a back seat to the food (especially the trademark enchiladas, filet mignon, and sautéed chicken), drink (namely Texas beers and prickly pear margaritas), and desserts (the cobbler for two is legendary). The funky West Texan decor—featuring numerous requisite longhorn skulls—is a contrast for the unexpectedly diverse menu,

which features a number of vegetarian and seafood options. The theater still occasionally hosts movie nights, as well as plays and live music.

In Historic Terlingua Ghost Town, off U.S. 90. ✆ **432/371-2326.** www.starlighttheatre.com. Main courses $7–$23. AE, MC, V. Daily 5–10pm. Bar open later.

## Camping

A $10 camping permit, available at any visitor center, is required for use of the primitive backcountry roadside and backpacking campsites. All are open year-round.

### In the Park

There are three developed campgrounds run by the National Park Service (no showers, laundry facilities, or RV hookups; $14 per night), and an RV park run by a concessionaire. A limited number of campsites in Rio Grande Village and the Chisos Basin campgrounds accept reservations from November 15 to April 15; call ✆ **877/444-6777** or visit **www.recreation.gov**.

**Rio Grande Village Campground** is the largest, with 100 sites, flush toilets, running water, and a dump station. It has numerous trees, many with prickly pear cactuses growing up around them, and thorny bushes everywhere. Sites are either graveled or paved and are nicely spaced for privacy. Sites are often taken by 1pm in winter (the busy season). One area is designated a "No Generator Zone." Separate but within walking distance is **Rio Grande Village Trailer Park** (✆ **432/477-2293**), a concessionaire-operated RV park with 25 sites with full hookups. It looks like a parking lot in the midst of grass and trees, fully paved with curbs and back-in sites (no pull-throughs). Cost is $26 per night. Tents are not permitted. A small store has limited camping supplies and groceries, a coin-operated laundry, showers for a fee, propane, and gasoline.

**Chisos Basin Campground** ★★, although not heavily wooded, has small pinyon and juniper trees and 65 well-spaced sites. The highest-elevation campground in the park at 5,400 feet, it's nestled around a circular road in a bowl below the visitor center. There is a dump station, flush toilets, and running water. The access road to the campground is steep and curved, so take it slowly. The campground is not recommended for trailers over 20 feet or motor homes over 24 feet.

**Cottonwood Campground** is named for the huge cottonwood trees that dominate the scene. The 31 first-come, first-served sites in this rather rustic area are spacious and within walking distance of the river. There are pit toilets, and generators may not be used.

### Near the Park

About 7 miles east of the park's North Entrance on FM 2627 is **Stillwell Store and RV Park,** HC 65, Box 430, Alpine, TX 79830-9752 (✆ **432/376-2244;** www.stillwellstore.com), a casual RV park in desert terrain that's open year-round. There are two areas across the road from each other. The west side has full hookups, while the east has water and electric only, but the east side also features horse corrals and plenty of room for horse trailers. There are 80 RV sites ($15–$18 per night) plus almost unlimited space for tenters, who are charged $5 per person. There's a dump station, showers, a self-serve laundry, and a public phone. The RV park's office is at the Stillwell Store, where you can get groceries, limited camping supplies, and gasoline. There is also a small museum (donations accepted), with exhibits from the Stillwell family's pioneer days.

# 2 GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK



Once a long reef below the ocean's surface, then a dense forest, Guadalupe Mountains National Park is today a rugged wilderness of tall Douglas firs and lush vegetation rising out of a vast desert. Here you will find varied hiking trails, panoramic vistas, the highest peak in Texas, plant and animal life unique in the Southwest, and a canyon that many believe is the prettiest spot in all of Texas.

As you approach from the north, the mountains seem to rise gradually from the landscape, but seen from the south they stand tall and dignified. El Capitan, the southern tip of the reef escarpment, watches over the landscape like a sentinel. In the south-central section of the park, Guadalupe Peak, at 8,749 feet the highest mountain in Texas, provides hikers with incredible views of the surrounding mountains and desert.

Within its 86,416 acres of land, the park has several hubs of human activity and distinct ecological zones. Park headquarters and the visitor center are at Pine Springs, along the park's southeast edge, where you'll also find a campground and several trail heads, including one with access to the Guadalupe Peak Trail, the park's premier mountain hike. Nearby, a short dirt road leads to historic Frijole Ranch, with a museum and more trail heads. A horse corral is nearby for those traveling with their steeds. The McKittrick Canyon section of the park, near the northeast corner, gets my vote as the most beautiful spot in Texas, especially in the fall when its oaks, maples, ash, and walnut trees produce a spectacular show of color. A day-use area only, McKittrick Canyon has a delightful although intermittent stream, a wide variety of plant and animal life, several trail heads, and historic buildings. Along the park's northern boundary, practically in New Mexico, is the secluded and forested Dog Canyon.

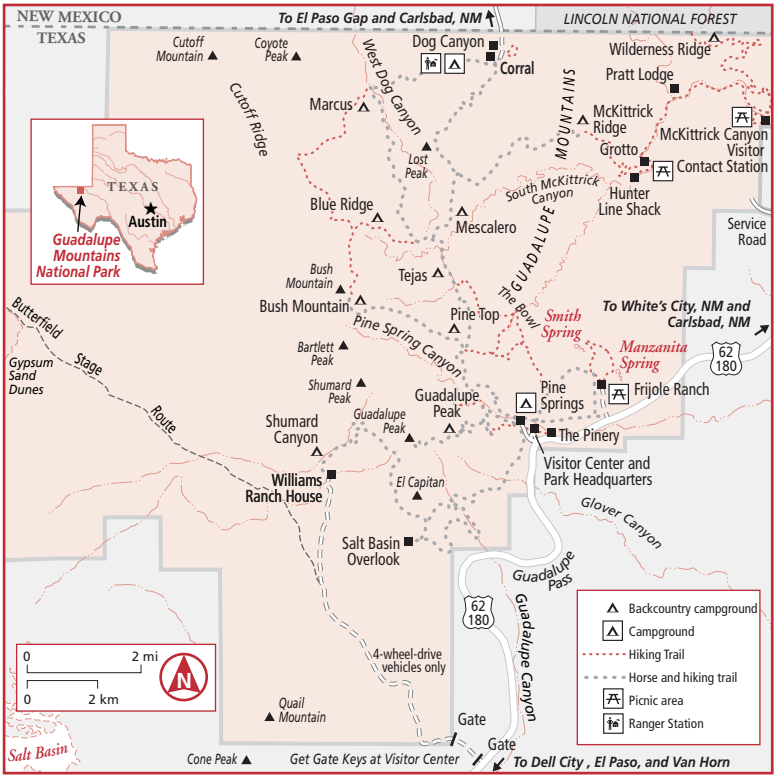
Particularly impressive about Guadalupe Mountains National Park is its vast variety of flora and fauna. You'll find species here that don't seem to belong in West Texas, such as the maple and oak, which produce the wonderful fall colors in McKittrick Canyon. Scientists say these seemingly out-of-place plants and animals are leftovers from a time when this region was cooler and wetter. As the climate changed and the desert spread, some species were able to survive in these mountains, where conditions remained somewhat cooler and moister. At the base of the mountains, at lower elevations, you'll find desert plants such as sotol, agave, and prickly pear cactus; but as you start to climb, especially in stream-nurtured canyons, expect to encounter ponderosa pine, ash, walnut, oak, and ferns. Wildlife abounds, including mule deer, elk, and all sorts of birds and the occasional snake.

It takes several days to fully explore this park, but just a half-day trip to McKittrick Canyon would be well worth your time.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Located on the border of New Mexico and Texas, the park is 55 miles southwest of Carlsbad, New Mexico, along U.S. 62/180. From El Paso, drive east 110 miles on U.S. 62/180 to the Pine Springs Visitor Center.

Air travelers can fly to **Cavern City Air Terminal** (✆ **505/887-1500**), at the south edge of the city of Carlsbad, which has commercial service from Albuquerque with **New Mexico Airlines** (✆ **888/564-6119;** www.flynma.com). The nearest major airport is **El Paso International** (✆ **915/780-4749;** www.elpasointernationalairport.com) in central El Paso just north of I-10, with service from most major airlines and car-rental companies; see chapter 10 for more information.




**VISITOR INFORMATION** Contact **Guadalupe Mountains National Park,** 400 Pine Canyon Rd., Salt Flat, TX 79847 (✆ **915/828-3251;** www.nps.gov/gumo). Books and maps can be ordered from the **Carlsbad Caverns Guadalupe Mountains Association,** 727 Carlsbad Caverns Hwy. (P.O. Box 417), Carlsbad, NM 88221 (✆ **575/785-2486;** www.ccgma.org).

Park headquarters and the main visitor center are located at Pine Springs just off U.S. 62/180. There are three other access points along this side of the park: Frijole Ranch, about a mile east of Pine Springs and a mile north of the highway; McKittrick Canyon (day use only), about 7 miles east and 4 miles north of the highway; and Williams Ranch, about 8 miles south of Pine Springs and 8 miles north of the highway on a four-wheel-drive road. (***Note:*** Keys to locked gates can be checked out at park headquarters.)

The **Pine Springs Visitor Center,** open daily year-round except Christmas, has natural history exhibits, a bookstore, and an introductory slide program. **McKittrick Canyon** has a visitor contact station with outdoor exhibits and an outdoor slide program on the history, geology, and natural history of the canyon. On the north side of the park is **Dog Canyon Ranger Station** (✆ **575/981-2418**), at the end of N. Mex. 137, about 70 miles from Carlsbad and 110 miles from park headquarters. Information, restrooms, and drinking water are available.

**FEES, REGULATIONS & PERMITS** Entry into the park runs $5 per person. Backcountry camping is free, but a permit is required. Corrals are available for those who bring their horses to ride in the park; although use is free, permits are required. All permits are available at the Pine Springs Visitor Center and Dog Canyon Ranger Station and must be requested in person, either the day before or the day of use. Horses are prohibited in the backcountry overnight.

Visitors to McKittrick Canyon, a day-use area, must stay on the trail; entering the stream is not permitted. The McKittrick Canyon **entrance gate** opens at 8am daily, and closes at 4:30pm Mountain Standard Time and at 6pm Mountain Daylight Time. Neither wood nor charcoal fires are allowed anywhere in the park.

**WHEN TO GO** In general, summers in the Guadalupe Mountains are hot (highs in the 80s and 90s/upper 20s and 30s Celsius, and lows in the 60s/upper teens Celsius) and winters are mild (highs in the 50s and 60s/teens Celsius and lows in the upper 20s and 30s/around 0 Celsius), but there can be sudden and extreme changes in the weather at any time. In winter and spring, high winds can whip down the mountain slopes, sometimes reaching 100 mph; on hot summer days, thunderstorms can blow up quickly. The sun is warm even in winter, and summer nights are generally cool no matter how hot the afternoon. Clothing that can be layered is best, comfortable and sturdy walking/hiking shoes are a must, a hat and sunscreen are highly recommended, and plenty of drinking water is essential for hikers.

Overall, Guadalupe Mountains National Park is one of America's less-visited national parks, with attendance of only about 225,000 each year. This is partly because it is primarily a wilderness park, where you'll have to tackle rugged hiking trails to get to the best vistas, but also because of its isolation. The only time the park might be considered even slightly crowded is during spring-break time, usually in March, when students from area colleges bring their backpacks and hit the trails. Quite a few families visit during the summer, but even then the park is not usually crowded; and visitation drops considerably once schools open in late August.

An exception is McKittrick Canyon, renowned throughout the Southwest for its beautiful fall colors, at their best in late October and early November. The one road into McKittrick Canyon is a bit busy then, but once you get on the trails you can usually walk away from the people.

**SAFETY** This is extremely rugged country, with sometimes unpredictable weather, and hikers need to be well prepared, with proper hiking boots and plenty of water. Because the park's backcountry trails often crisscross each other and can be confusing, rangers strongly recommend that hikers carry topographical maps.

**RANGER PROGRAMS** On summer evenings, rangers offer programs at the campground amphitheater.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### Exploring the Highlights by Car

This is not the place for the vehicle-bound. There are no paved scenic drives traversing the park; roads here are simply means of getting to historical sites and trail heads.

### Historic Sites

**The Pinery** was 1 of 200 stagecoach stations along the 2,800-mile Butterfield Overland Mail Coach Route. The stations provided fresh mules every 20 miles and a new coach every 300 miles, in order to maintain the grueling speed of 5 mph 24 hours a day. John

Butterfield had seen the need for overland mail delivery between the Eastern states and the West Coast, so he designed a route and the coaches, and acquired a federal contract to deliver the St. Louis mail to San Francisco in 25 days. In March 1857 this was a real feat, and the remaining rock walls at the ruins of the Pinery, which you can see on the Pinery Trail (see "Hiking," below) commemorate Butterfield's achievement.

Located in McKittrick Canyon and accessible by a 4.8-mile round-trip hike, **Pratt Cabin** was built by Wallace E. Pratt in 1931 and 1932, of stone quarried from the base of the Guadalupe Mountains, using heart-of-pine from east Texas for rafters, collar beams, and roof supports. Pratt, a geologist for the Humble Oil Co. (now ExxonMobil), and his family came for summer vacations when the heat in Houston became unbearable. He finally retired here in 1945. In 1957, the Pratts donated 5,632 acres of their 16,000-acre ranch to the federal government to begin the national park. In addition to the grand stone lodge, there are several outbuildings, stone picnic tables, and a stone fence.

**Williams Ranch House** rests at the base of a 3,000-foot rock cliff on the west face of the Guadalupe Mountains. The 7 1/3-mile access road, navigable only by high-clearance 4×4s, follows part of the old Butterfield Overland Mail Route for about 2 miles. The road crosses private land and has two locked metal gates, for which you must sign out keys at the visitor center.

History is unclear on exactly who built the house and when, but it's believed to have been built around 1908, and it is fairly certain that the first inhabitants were Henry and Rena Belcher. For almost 10 years, they maintained a substantial ranch here, at times with close to 3,000 head of longhorn cattle. Water was piped from Bone Spring down the canyon to holding tanks in the lowlands. James Adolphus Williams acquired the property around 1917, and with the help of an Indian friend, ranched and farmed the land until moving to New Mexico in 1941. After Williams's death in 1942, Judge J. C. Hunter bought the property, adding it to his already large holdings in the Guadalupes.

Another historic site is **Frijole Ranch,** which was a working ranch from when it was built in the 1870s until 1972. Inside the ranch house is a museum with exhibits on the cultural history of the Guadalupe Mountains, including prehistoric Indians, the later Mescalero Apaches, Spanish conquistadors, and ranchers of the 19th and 20th centuries. On the grounds are several historic buildings, including a schoolhouse.

## Outdoor Adventures

### Hiking ★★

This is a prime hiker's park, with more than 80 miles of trails that range from easy walks to steep, strenuous, and sometimes treacherous adventures. Among shorter trails, try the **Indian Meadow Nature Trail** ★, with access from Dog Canyon Campground (walk south from the water fountain). This exceptionally easy .6-mile round-trip stroll follows a series of numbered stops keyed to a free brochure, available at the trail head. You'll learn about the native vegetation and cultural history of the area as you ramble along this virtually level dirt trail. The name comes from early settlers, who told of seeing Indian tepees in this lovely meadow. The **McKittrick Canyon Nature Trail** ★, rated moderate due to a rocky trail, is .9 mile round-trip, and begins at the McKittrick Canyon contact station. A great way to discover the variety of plants and animals that inhabit the canyon, this trail, which has some steep climbs, posts numerous educational signs along the path telling you why rattlesnakes are underappreciated and how the cactus supplies food and water for wildlife.

The easy .75-mile round-trip **Pinery Trail** (paved and accessible by wheelchair) gives visitors a brief introduction to the low-elevation environment at the park. Interpretive signs discuss the plants along the trail and the history of the area. About .25 miles from

the visitor center the trail makes a loop around the ruins of an old horse-changing station, left over from the Butterfield Stage Route (see "Historic Sites," above). The trail head is by the Pine Springs Visitor Center, or from the parking area on U.S. 62/180, located 1 mile north of the visitor center entrance road.

Among the park's longer trails, my favorite is the moderate-to-difficult **McKittrick Canyon Trail** ★★★, which is 5.1 miles one-way, with access at the McKittrick Canyon Trail trail head. I think McKittrick Canyon is the most beautiful spot in all of Texas, and this trail explores the length of it. The first 2.4 miles to the Pratt Cabin are moderate because of rocky trail conditions; the following 1.2 miles to the Grotto gain 340 feet in elevation and are also considered moderate; and the strenuous climb to the Notch rises nearly 1,300 feet in just 1.6 miles. Even so, this is one of the most popular hikes in the park, though not everyone makes it to the Notch.

The canyon is forested with conifers and deciduous trees. In fall the walnut and ash trees burst into color, painting the world in bright colors set off by the brown of the oaks and the rich variety of the evergreens. The stream in the canyon, which appears and disappears several times in the first 3 miles of the trail, is a permanent stream with reproducing trout. Hikers may not drink from, wade in, or disturb the stream in any way.

The first part of the trail is wide and seems quite flat, crossing the stream twice on its way to Pratt Cabin, which is wonderfully situated at the convergence of North and South McKittrick canyons. About a mile from the lodge a short spur veers off to the left to the Grotto, a recess with odd formations that look like they belong in an underground cave. This is a great spot for lunch at one of the stone picnic tables. Continuing down the spur trail to its end, you reach the Hunter Line Cabin, which served as temporary quarters for ranch hands of the Hunter family. Beyond the cabin, South McKittrick Canyon has been preserved as a Research Natural Area with no entry. Return to the main trail and continue toward the Notch, or head back down the canyon to your car. In another .5 mile, the trail begins switchbacking up the side of South McKittrick Canyon for the steepest ascent in the park, until it slips through the Notch, a distinctive narrow spot in the cliff. Sit down and rest while you absorb the incredible scenery. The view down the canyon is magnificent and quite dazzling in autumn. You can see both Hunter Line Cabin and Pratt Lodge in the distance. Remember to start down in time to reach your car well before the gate closes (see "Fees, Regulations & Permits," above).

To stand at the highest point in Texas, hike the strenuous **Guadalupe Peak Trail** ★★, which goes 4.2 miles from the trail head in Pine Springs Campground to the top of 8,749-foot-high Guadalupe Peak, where the magnificent views make the almost 3,000-foot climb worthwhile. If you have only 1 day to explore this park, and you are an average or better hiker, this is the hike you should choose. Start early, take plenty of water, and be prepared to work. When you've gone about halfway, you'll see what seems to be the top not too far ahead, but beware: This is a false summit. Study the changing life zones as you climb from the desert into the higher-elevation pine forests—this will take your mind off your straining muscles and aching lungs. A mile short of the summit, a campground lies in one of the rare level spots on the mountain. If you plan to spend the night, strongly anchor your tent, as the winds can be ferocious up here, especially in spring.

From the summit, the views are stupendous. To the north are Shumard Peak and Bush Mountain, the next two highest points in Texas, with respective elevations of 8,615 and 8,631 feet. The Chihuahuan Desert stretches to the south, interrupted only by the Delaware and Sierra Diablo mountains. This is one of those "on a clear day you can see forever" spots—sometimes all the way to 12,003-foot-high Sierra Blanca, near Ruidoso, New Mexico, 100 miles north.

**Tips Leaf Peepin'**

McKittrick Canyon's beautiful display of fall colors usually takes place between late October and early November. It varies, though, so call before going.

### Horseback Riding

About 60% of the park's trails are open to horses for day trips, but horses are not permitted in the backcountry overnight. There are **corrals** at Frijole Ranch (near Pine Springs) and Dog Canyon (see "Visitor Information," above). Each set of corrals contains four pens that can accommodate up to 10 horses. There are no horses or other pack animals available for hire in or near the park. Park rangers warn that horses brought into the park should be accustomed to steep, rocky trails.

### Wildlife Viewing

Because of the variety of habitats here, and also because these canyons offer some of the few water sources in West Texas, Guadalupe Mountains National Park offers excellent wildlife viewing and bird-watching possibilities. **McKittrick Canyon** and **Frijole Ranch** are considered among the best wildlife viewing spots, but a variety of species can be seen throughout the park. Those spending more than a few hours will likely see mule deer, and the park is also home to a herd of some 50 to 70 elk, which are sometimes seen in the higher elevations or along the highway in winter. Other **mammals** include raccoons, striped and hog-nosed skunks, gray foxes, coyotes, gray-footed chipmunks, Texas antelope squirrels, black-tailed jack rabbits, and desert cottontails. Black bears and mountain lions also live in the park, but are seldom seen.

About two dozen varieties of **snakes** make their home in the park, including five species of rattlesnakes. There are also numerous **lizards,** which are usually seen in the mornings and early evenings. These include the collared, crevice spiny, tree, side-blotched, and Texas horned lizards, and Chihuahuan spotted whiptails. The most commonly seen is the prairie lizard, identified by the light-colored stripes down its back.

More than 200 species of **birds** are known to spend time in the park, including peregrine falcons, golden eagles, turkey vultures, and wild turkeys. You are also likely to encounter rock wrens, canyon wrens, black-throated sparrows, common nighthawks, mourning doves, rufous-crowned sparrows, mountain chickadees, ladder-backed woodpeckers, solitary vireos, and western scrub jays.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

There are no accommodations or restaurants within the park. Two of the closest communities offering lodging and dining are in New Mexico: **White's City,** 35 miles from the park, and **Carlsbad,** 55 miles from the park, which are discussed below in the section on Carlsbad Caverns National Park. **Van Horn,** Texas, is another option, 45 miles south of the park.

### Camping

#### In the Park

There are two developed vehicle-accessible campgrounds in the park. Both are open year-round, cost $8 per night, and have restrooms and drinking water, but no showers or RV hookups. **Pine Springs Campground** ★ is near the visitor center and park headquarters

just off U.S. 62/180. There are 19 spaces for RVs, 20 very attractive tent sites, and two group campsites (call park headquarters for information). About a half-mile inside the north boundary of the park is **Dog Canyon Campground,** accessible from N. Mex. 137. Here there are nine tent sites and four RV sites. Although reservations are not accepted, you can call ahead to check on availability of sites (✆ **915/828-3251**). Camp stoves are allowed, but wood and charcoal fires are prohibited.

The park also has 10 designated **backcountry campgrounds,** with from five to eight sites each. Be sure to pick up free permits at the Pine Springs Visitor Center or Dog Canyon Ranger Station the day of or the day before your backpacking trip. Water is available at trail heads, but is not available in the backcountry. All trash, including toilet paper, must be packed out. Fires are strictly prohibited; use cookstoves only. You can camp only in designated campgrounds.

### Near the Park

Nothing is actually nearby, but you'll find commercial camping in New Mexico at **White's City RV Park** in White's City (35 miles from the park), which is discussed below in the section on Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

## 3 A SIDE TRIP TO CARLSBAD CAVERNS NATIONAL PARK

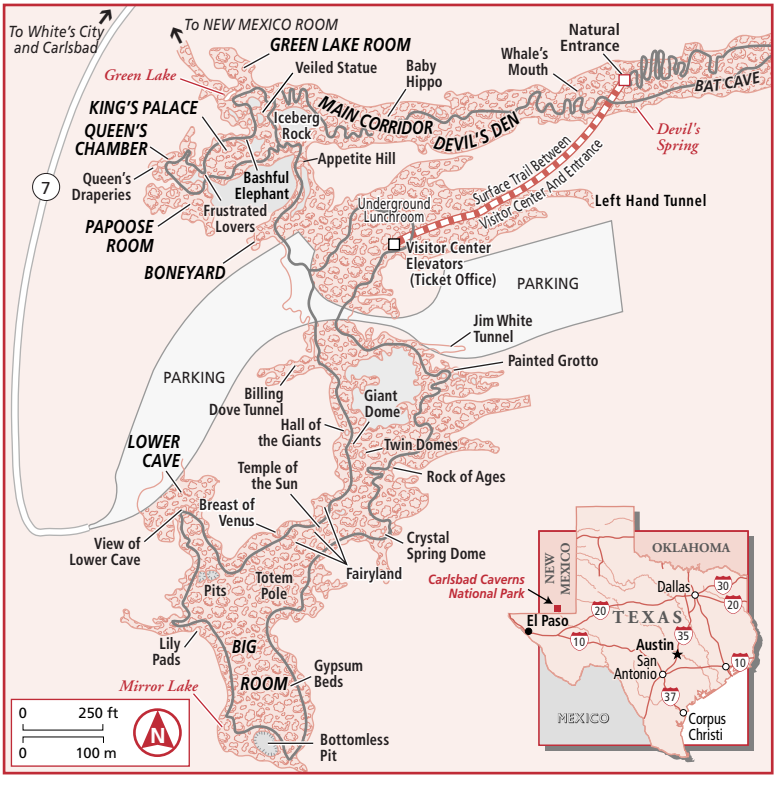
One of the largest and most spectacular cave systems in the world, Carlsbad Caverns National Park comprises more than 100 known caves that snake through the porous limestone reef of the Guadalupe Mountains. Fantastic and grotesque formations fascinate visitors, who find every shape imaginable (and unimaginable) naturally sculpted in the underground—from frozen waterfalls to strands of pearls, soda straws to miniature castles, draperies to ice-cream cones. Plan to spend a full day.

Formation of the caverns began some 250 million years ago, when a huge inland sea covered this region. Then, about 20 million years ago, a reef that was once undersea moved upward, ultimately breaking free of thousands of feet of sediment enshrouding it. As tectonic forces pushed the buried rock up, erosion wore away softer minerals, leaving behind the Guadalupe Mountains. Brine from gas and oil deposits mingled with rainwater, creating sulfuric acid that dissolved limestone and created cave passages.

Once the caves were hollowed out, nature became artistic, decorating the rooms with a vast variety of fanciful formations. Very slowly, water dripped down through the rock into the caves, dissolving more limestone and absorbing the mineral calcite and other materials on its journey. Each drop of water then deposited its tiny load of calcite, gradually creating the cave formations we see today.

Although American Indians had known of Carlsbad Cavern (the park's main cave) for centuries, it was not discovered by settlers until ranchers in the 1880s were attracted by sunset flights of bats emerging from the cave. The first reported trip into the cave was in 1883, when a man supposedly lowered his 12-year-old son into the cave entrance. A cowboy named Jim White, who worked for mining companies that collected bat droppings for use as a fertilizer, began to explore the cave in the late 1800s. Fascinated by the formations, White shared his discovery with others, and soon word of this magical below-ground world spread.

Carlsbad Cave National Monument was created in October 1923. In 1926, the first electric lights were installed, and in 1930 Carlsbad Caverns gained national park status.




Underground development at the park has been confined to the famous Big Room, one of the largest and most easily accessible of the caverns, with a ceiling 25 stories high and a floor large enough to hold six football fields. Visitors can tour parts of it on their own, aided by a state-of-the-art portable audio guide, and explore other sections and several other caves on guided tours. The cave is also a summer home to about 300,000 Mexican free-tailed bats, which hang from the ceiling of Bat Cave during the day, but put on a spectacular show each evening as they leave the cave in search of food, and again in the morning when they return for a good day's sleep.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** The main section of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, with the visitor center and entrance to Carlsbad Cavern, the park's main cave, is located about 35 miles from Guadalupe Mountains National Park. From Guadalupe Mountains National Park take U.S. 62/180 northeast to White's City, and turn left onto N. Mex. 7, the park access road. You enter the boundary of Carlsbad Caverns National Park almost immediately and reach the visitor center in about 7 miles. From the city of Carlsbad, head 30 miles southwest on U.S. 62/180 and then 7 miles on N. Mex. 7 to the visitor center.

For airport information, see the "Getting There" section under "Guadalupe Mountains National Park," earlier in this chapter.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Contact **Carlsbad Caverns National Park,** 3225 National Parks Hwy., Carlsbad, NM 88220 (✆ **575/785-2232;** www.nps.gov/cave). Books and maps can be ordered from the **Carlsbad Caverns Guadalupe Mountains Association,** 727 Carlsbad Caverns Hwy. (P.O. Box 417), Carlsbad, NM 88221 (✆ **575/785-2486;** www.ccgma.org).

The visitor center is open daily from 8am to 7pm from Memorial Day to Labor Day; and self-guided cave tours can be started from 8:30am to 5pm. The rest of the year the visitor center is open from 8am to 5pm, with self-guided cave tours from 8:30am to 3:30pm. Tour times and schedules may be modified during slower times in the winter. The park is closed on Christmas Day.

At the visitor center are displays depicting the geology and history of the caverns, bats and other wildlife, and a three-dimensional model of the caverns. You can get information about the tours available and other park activities, both above- and below-ground. There is also a well-stocked bookstore, a restaurant, and a gift shop.

**FEES** Admission to the visitor center and aboveground sections of the park is free. The basic cavern entry fee, which is good for 3 days and includes self-guided tours of the Natural Entrance and Big Room, is $6 for adults and free for children 15 and under. Annual passes and senior passes are good for the entry of four adults.

A general cave admission ticket is required in addition to tour fees for all guided cave tours except those to Slaughter Canyon Cave and Spider Cave. Reservations are required for all guided tours. Holders of annual and senior passports receive 50% discounts on tours. The Kings Palace guided tour costs $8 for adults, $4 for children ages 6 to 15, and is free for children ages 4 and 5 with an adult—younger children are not permitted. Guided tours of Left Hand Tunnel, limited to those 6 and older, cost $7 for adults and $3.50 for children 6 to 15. Guided tours of Spider Cave, Lower Cave, and Hall of the White Giant are limited to those 12 and older, and cost $20 for adults and $10 for youths 12 to 15. Slaughter Canyon Cave tours, for those 6 and older, cost $15 for adults and $7.50 for children 6 to 15. You can make reservations for cave tours up to 3 months in advance by phone or online (✆ **800/444-6777;** www.recreation.gov).

**REGULATIONS & PERMITS** As you would expect, damaging the cave formations in any way is prohibited. What some people do not understand is that they should not even touch the formations, walls, or ceilings. This is not only because many of the features are delicate and easily broken, but also because skin oils will both discolor the rock and disturb the mineral deposits that are necessary for growth.

All tobacco use is prohibited underground. In addition, food, drinks, candy, and chewing gum are not allowed on the underground trails. Those making wishes should not throw coins or other objects into the underground pools.

Cave explorers should wear flat shoes with rubber soles and heels, because of the slippery paths. Children 15 and under must remain with an adult at all times while in the caves. Although strollers are not allowed for younger children, child backpacks are a good idea, but beware of low ceilings and doorways along the pathways.

No photography is permitted at the evening Bat Flight programs without a special permit.

Pets are not permitted in the caverns, on park trails, or in the backcountry, and because of the hot summer temperatures, pets should not be left unattended in vehicles. There is a kennel (✆ **575/785-2281**) available at the visitor center. It has cages in an

air-conditioned room, but no runs, and is primarily used by pet owners for periods of 3 hours or so while they are on cave tours. Pets are provided with water, but not food, and there are no grooming or overnight facilities. Reservations are not necessary; cost is $5 per pet.

Free permits, available at the visitor center, are required for all overnight hikes into the backcountry.

**WHEN TO GO** The climate aboveground is warm in the summer, with highs often in the 90s (mid-30s Celsius) and sometimes exceeding 100°F (38°C), and evening lows in the mid-60s (teens Celsius). Winters are mild, with highs in the 50s and 60s (teens Celsius) in the day and nighttime lows usually in the 20s and 30s (around 0°C). Summers are known for sudden intense afternoon and evening thunderstorms; August and September see the most rain. Underground it's another story entirely, with a year-round temperature that varies little from its average temperature of 56°F (13°C), making a jacket or sweater a welcome companion.

Crowds are thickest in summer, and on weekends and holidays year-round, so visiting on weekdays between Labor Day and Memorial Day is the best way to avoid them. January is the quietest month.

Visiting during the park's off season is especially attractive because the climate in the caves doesn't vary regardless of the weather on top, where the winters are generally mild and summers warm to hot. The only downside to an off-season visit is that you won't be able to see the bat flights. The bats head to Mexico when the weather starts to get chilly, usually by late October, and don't return until May. There are also fewer guided cave tours off season, although those tours will have fewer people. The best time to see the park might well be in September, when you can still see the bat flights but there are fewer visitors than during the peak summer season.

**RANGER PROGRAMS** In addition to the cave tours, which are discussed below, rangers give a talk on bats at sunset each evening from mid-May to October at the cavern's Natural Entrance (times change; check at the visitor center or call ✆ **575/785-3012**). Rangers also offer a variety of demonstrations, talks, guided nature walks, and other programs daily. Especially popular are the climbing programs, where rangers demonstrate caving techniques. In recent years there has also been a series of stargazing programs presented by graduate students from New Mexico State University. The park also offers a **Junior Ranger Program,** in which kids can earn badges by completing various activities. Details are available at the visitor center.

On the second Thursday in August (usually), a "bat flight breakfast" from 5 to 7am encourages visitors to watch the bats return to the cavern after their night of insect hunting. Park rangers prepare breakfast for early-morning visitors for a small fee and then join them to watch the early-morning return flight. Call the park for details.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### Exploring the Highlights by Car

No, you can't take your car into the caves, but for a close-up as well as panoramic view of the Chihuahuan Desert, head out on the **Walnut Canyon Desert Drive,** a 9½-mile loop. You'll want to drive slowly on the one-way gravel road, both for safety and to thoroughly appreciate the dramatic scenery. Passenger cars can easily handle the tight turns and narrow passage, but the road is not recommended for motor homes or cars pulling trailers. Pick up an informational brochure at the visitor center bookstore.

## Caving Adventures ★★★

Carlsbad Cavern (the park's main cave), Slaughter Canyon Cave, and Spider Cave are open to the general public. All guided tours must be reserved and have individual fees in addition to the general cave entry fee (see "Fees," above). Guided tours are sometimes fully booked weeks in advance, so reserve early.

Most park visitors head first to Carlsbad Cavern, which has elevators, a paved walkway, and an underground rest area. A 1-mile section of the Big Room self-guided tour is accessible to those in wheelchairs (no wheelchairs are available at the park), though it's best to have another person along to assist. Pick up a free accessibility guide at the visitor center.

The Big Room Tour, Natural Entrance Route, and King's Palace Guided Tour are the most popular trails, and all of them are lighted, are paved, and have handrails. However, the Big Room is the only one of the three that's considered easy. The formations along these trails are strategically lit to display them at their most dramatic. This also means that today's visitors can see much more of the cave than early explorers, who were limited by their weak lanterns.

The **Big Room Self-Guided Tour** ★★★ is an easy 1-mile loop that you get to by taking the visitor center elevator to the Underground Rest Area or via the Natural Entrance Route (see below). Considered the one thing that all visitors to Carlsbad Caverns National Park must do, this easy trail meanders through a massive chamber—it isn't called the Big Room for nothing—where you'll see some of the park's most spectacular formations and likely be overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. Allow about 1 hour.

The **Natural Entrance Route,** also 1 mile, is considered moderate to difficult, and is accessed outside the visitor center. This fairly strenuous hike takes you into Carlsbad Cavern on the same basic route used by its early explorers. You leave the daylight to enter a big hole, and then descend more than 750 feet into the cavern on a steep and narrow switchback trail, moving from the "twilight zone" of semidarkness to the depths of the cave, which would be totally black without the electric lights conveniently provided by the Park Service. The self-guided tour takes about 1 hour and ends near the elevators, which can take you back to the visitor center. However, I strongly recommend that from here you proceed on the Big Room Self-Guided Tour if you have not already been there.

The **King's Palace Guided Tour** ★★ is a moderate 1-mile loop that you get to by taking the visitor center elevator to the underground rest area. This 1½-hour ranger-led walk wanders through some of the cave's most scenic chambers, where you'll see wonderfully fanciful formations in the King's Palace, Queen's Chamber, and Green Lake Room. Watch for the delightful Bashful Elephant formation between the King's Palace and Green Lake Room. Along the way, rangers discuss the geology of the cave and early explorers' experiences. Although the path is paved, there is an 80-foot elevation change.

### Ranger-Led Cave Tours

In addition to the popular self-guided and guided tours discussed above, there are a number of ranger-led tours to less-developed sections of Carlsbad Cavern that provide more of the experience of exploration and genuine caving than the above tours over well-trodden trails. These caving tours vary in difficulty, but all include a period of absolute darkness or "blackout," which can make some people uncomfortable. Because some tours involve walking or crawling through tight spaces, people who suffer from claustrophobia should discuss specifics with rangers before purchasing tickets.

**Left Hand Tunnel** starts in the visitor center near the elevator. The easiest of the caving tours, in this one you actually get to walk (rather than crawl) the entire time! Hand-carried lanterns (provided by the Park Service) light the way, and the trail is dirt but relatively level. You'll see a variety of formations, fossils from Permian times, and pools of water. Open to those 6 and older, this tour takes about 2 hours. The moderate **Lower Cave Tour,** which is 1-mile round-trip, starts at the visitor center near the elevator. This 3-hour trek involves descending or climbing over 50 feet of ladders, and an optional crawl. It takes you through an area that was explored by a National Geographic Society expedition in the 1920s, and you'll see artifacts from that and other explorations. In addition, you'll encounter a variety of formations, including cave pearls, which look a lot like the pearls created by oysters and can be as big as golf balls. This tour is open to those 12 and older only. Four AA batteries are required for the provided headlamp; sturdy hiking boots and gloves are recommended.

The **Hall of the White Giant Tour,** which starts at the visitor center, is only .5 mile (one-way), but it is strenuous and will take 3 to 4 hours as you crawl through narrow, dirty passageways and climb up slippery rocks. The highlight is, of course, the huge formation called the White Giant. Only those in excellent physical condition should consider this tour; children must be at least age 12. Four AA batteries for the provided headlamp and sturdy hiking boots are required; and kneepads, gloves, and long pants are strongly recommended.

## More Cave Tours

It takes some hiking to reach the other caves in the park, so carry drinking water, especially on hot summer days. All children 15 and under must be accompanied by an adult; other age restrictions apply as well. Each tour includes a period of true and total darkness, or "blackout."

The **Slaughter Canyon Cave Tour** ★★ is 1.25 miles round-trip and is considered moderate. The parking area is about a 45-minute drive from Carlsbad and is reached via U.S. 62/180, going south 5 miles from White's City to a marked turnoff that leads 11 miles to the parking lot. Discovered in 1937, this cave was mined for bat guano (used as fertilizer) until the 1950s. It consists of a corridor 1,140 feet long with many side passageways. This highly recommended guided tour lasts about 2 hours, plus at least another half-hour to hike up the steep trail to the cave entrance. No crawling is involved, although the smooth flowstone and old bat guano on the floor can be slippery, so hiking boots are recommended. You'll see a number of pristine cave formations, including the crystal-decorated Christmas Tree, the 89-foot-high Monarch, and the menacing Klansman. Open to children 6 and older; participants must take D battery flashlights.

The 4-hour tour of **Spider Cave** is a very strenuous 1-mile loop (plus a half-mile hike to and from cave). Meet at the visitor center and follow a ranger to the cave. This tour is ideal for those who want the experience of a rugged caving adventure as well as some great underground scenery. Highlights include climbing down a 15-foot ladder, squeezing through very tight passageways, and climbing on slick surfaces—all this after a fairly tough half-mile hike to the cave entrance. But it's worth it. The cave has numerous beautiful formations—most much smaller than those in the Big Room—and picturesque pools of water. Children must be at least 12 years old. Participants need four AA batteries for the provided headlamps and good hiking boots. Kneepads, gloves, and long pants are strongly recommended.

## Bats, Birds & Other Wildlife Viewing

At sunset, from mid-May to October, a crowd gathers at the Natural Entrance to watch hundreds of thousands of **bats** take off for a night of insect hunting. An amphitheater in front of the Natural Entrance provides seating, and ranger programs are held each evening (exact times vary; check at the visitor center or call ✆ **575/785-3012**) during the bats' residence at the park (the bats winter in Mexico). The most bats will be seen in August and September, when baby bats born earlier in the summer join their parents and migrating bats from the north on the nightly forays. Early risers can also see the return of the bats just before dawn.

However, bats aren't the only wildlife at Carlsbad Caverns. The park has a surprising number of **birds**—more than 300 species—many of which are seen in the Rattlesnake Springs area. Among species you're likely to see are turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, scaled quail, killdeer, lesser nighthawks, black-chinned hummingbirds, vermilion flycatchers, northern mockingbirds, and western meadowlarks. In addition, each summer several thousand cave swallows usually build their mud nests on the ceiling just inside the Carlsbad Cavern Natural Entrance (the bats make their home farther back in the cave).

Among the park's **larger animals** are mule deer and raccoons, which are sometimes spotted near the Natural Entrance at the time of the evening bat flights. The park is also home to porcupines, hog-nosed skunks, desert cottontails, black-tailed jack rabbits, rock squirrels, and the more elusive ringtails, coyotes, and gray fox. These are sometimes seen in the late evenings along the park entrance road and the Walnut Canyon Desert Drive.



## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

There are no accommodations within the park, but there are two concessionaire-operated restaurants (✆ **575/785-2281**). A family-style full-service restaurant at the **visitor center** serves three meals daily in the $5-to-$10 range. The restaurant is open from 8:30am to 5pm most of the year, with extended hours from Memorial Day to mid-August and on Labor Day weekend. The **Underground Rest Area,** located inside the main cavern 750 feet below-ground, has a cafeteria-style eatery offering snacks and box lunches. Its hours are coordinated with cave hours.

The closest lodging properties are 7 miles east of the visitor center at White's City, which contains a variety of businesses under one management, including two motels, restaurants, shops, a museum, gas station, and an RV park. The **Best Western Cavern Inn,** 17 Carlsbad Cavern Hwy. at N. Mex. 7 (✆ **800/228-3767** or 575/785-2291; www.whitescity.com), along with its sister property across the street, offers spacious rooms with Southwestern decor. Double rates are $72 to $80. The White's City arcade also contains a couple of restaurants, a post office, a small grocery store, a gift shop, a museum, and a theater for weekend melodramas.

The next closest services are in and near the city of Carlsbad, 30 miles northeast of White's City on U.S. 62. Here you'll find several chain and franchise motels and a number of independent and chain restaurants. Motels on the southwest edge of the city, on the road to Carlsbad Caverns, include **Best Western Stevens Inn,** 1829 S. Canal St. (✆ **800/730-2851** or 575/887-2851), with double rates of $80 to $100. Also in this area are the **Comfort Inn,** 2429 W. Pierce St. (✆ **800/228-5150** or 575/887-1994); **Days Inn,** 3910 National Parks Hwy. (✆ **800/325-2525** or 575/887-7800); and **Super 8 Motel,** 3817 National Parks Hwy. (✆ **800/800-8000** or 575/887-8888), with similar rates.

For more information, contact the **Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce,** 302 S. Canal St., Carlsbad, NM 88220 (✆ **575/887-6516;** www.carlsbadchamber.com).

## Camping

There are no developed campgrounds or vehicle camping of any kind in the national park. Backcountry camping, however, is permitted in some areas; pick up free permits at the visitor center.

The closest camping is **White's City RV Park,** 17 Carlsbad Cavern Hwy. at N. Mex. 7 (✆ **800/228-3767** or 575/785-2291; www.whitescity.com), located in the White's City complex at the eastern edge of the park boundary, about 7 miles east of the visitor center. In addition to RV sites with hookups and shade shelters, the campground has practically unlimited tent camping. There's a dump station and a clean bathhouse. Because the campground is part of the White's City complex, campers have access to its pools, restaurants, and other services. Rates for both RVs and tents are $20 to $28 per night.

# 12 The Panhandle Plains

*by Eric Peterson*

A wide-open sea of prairie, the high plains of northern Texas might well be the nation's crossroads: The small-town charm of the Great Plains, the spice of the Southwest, and the polite twang of the South are all present in equal measures. Beyond this cultural intersection, highways have crisscrossed the region since the 1930s, fostering a brood of cheap motels and kitschy roadside Americana.

Inhabited by nomadic tribes for much of the past 12,000 years, the Panhandle Plains are distinguished by a high mesa—3,000 feet above sea level—that tapers downhill to the south and east, bordered by spectacular canyons and unique geological formations. In 1541, when Vásquez de Coronado ventured north in his quest for the fabled Seven Cities of Gold, he pounded stakes into the ground to claim the land for Spain—as well as mark his route for a return trip through the mostly featureless flatlands. Thus, the "Llano Estacado," Spanish for "staked plains," was born. Today, Lubbock inhabits the center of the mesa that Coronado staked out; Amarillo sits on its northern edge.

The late 19th century brought significant change to the area: Ranchers began to graze cattle here, railroads crisscrossed the mesa in all directions, and agriculture took hold as the predominant industry. Million-acre ranches became the norm. During the fall and winter of 1874 and 1875, the indigenous tribes battled the U.S. Army in the Red River War, culminating with the dispersal of Comanches, Kiowas, and Southern Cheyennes to reservations in Oklahoma.

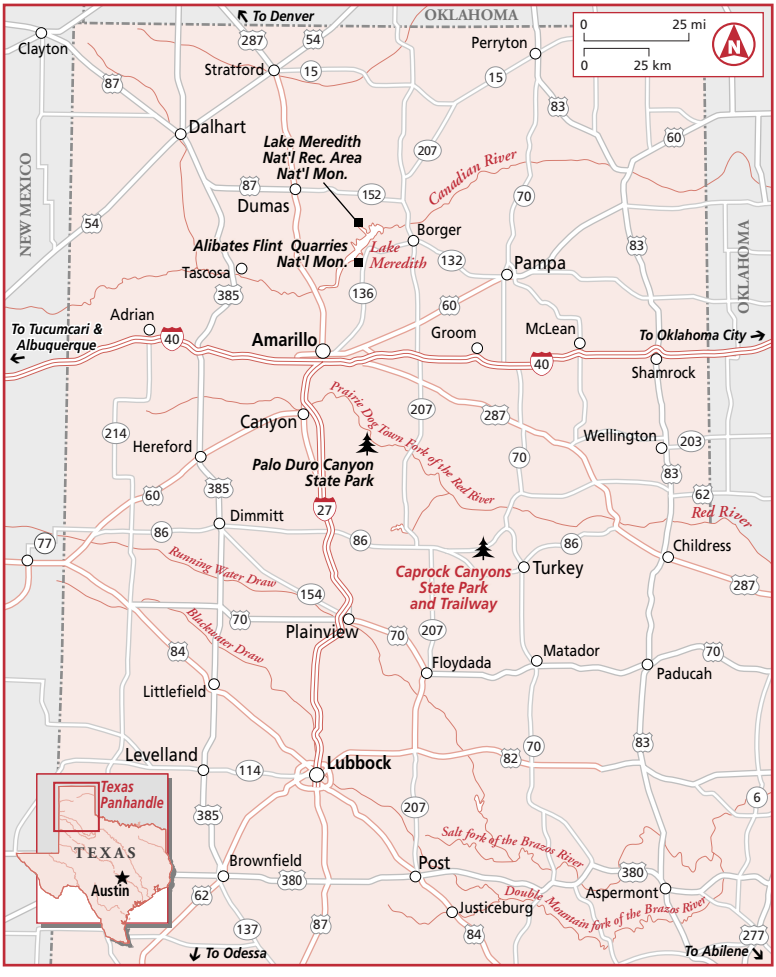
The landscape was irrevocably altered again by the discovery of oil in the 1920s, when ranchers found themselves sitting on "black gold" mines. The Dust Bowl days of the 1930s dampened development, but the area recovered and saw tremendous growth following World War II.

At first glance, the Panhandle Plains might appear monotonous, but the region is actually worth a closer look than you'll get from behind the wheel. The magnificent palette of Palo Duro Canyon, the lively nightlife in Lubbock, and Amarillo's ranching heritage—from cattle to Cadillacs—are unexpected diversions that make this area a worthy stopover on a cross-country trip.

## 1 AMARILLO

122 miles N of Lubbock; 267 miles E of Albuquerque, New Mexico

The commercial center of the Texas Panhandle, Amarillo arose when the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway started laying track in the area in 1887, a decade after ranchers began to graze their cattle on the buffalo grass–speckled plains. When the town was formally incorporated, the name Amarillo—meaning "yellow" literally and "wild horse" figuratively—was adopted from a nearby lake. In a little over a decade, the combination of the railroad and the ranchland led to the establishment of Amarillo's long-standing status as a cattle-shipping capital. To this day, the city "smells like money" most when the Amarillo Livestock Auction is in full swing.




While its agricultural r oots remain the cornerstone of the local economy , Amarillo's location on a major east-w est highway—Route 66 until 1970 and I-40 ther eafter—has long made it a popular stopo ver for tourists, with a plethora of motels and r estaurants catering to the cr oss-country crowd. Amarillo is fairly lo w-key and nondescript at first glance, but it's a pleasant, inexpensive spot for an overnight stay. Several of its attractions are must-see tourist traps, namely the r oadside kitsch of Cadillac Ranch and the B ig Texan steakhouse. As a destination, Amarillo can be a fun place to spend a w eekend, especially for those with a taste for co wboy culture.

## Getting There

**BY PLANE** More than 50 commercial flights take off or land daily from **Rick Husband Amarillo International Airport** (✆ 806/335-1671), off I-40 exit 76 (Lakeside Dr.) at 10801 Airport Blvd., 7 miles east of downtown. Airlines serving Amarillo include **American Eagle** (✆ 800/433-7300), **Continental Express** (✆ 800/525-0280), and **Southwest** (✆ 800/435-9792). Car rentals are available from **Avis** (✆ 806/335-2313), **Hertz** (✆ 806/335-2331), **Enterprise** (✆ 806/335-9443), and **National** (✆ 806/335-2311).

**BY CAR** Coming from east or west, Amarillo can be accessed via I-40, exits 62 (Hope Rd.) through 75 (Lakeside Dr.). The primary downtown exit is 70 (Taylor/Buchanan sts.), and the airport is located northeast of exit 75. Coming from the north by car, you'll likely enter Amarillo via U.S. 87/287, which takes you through downtown and continues south to Canyon and Lubbock as I-27. If you are coming from the northwest, Texas FM 1061 can be used as a shortcut from U.S. 385; it becomes Tascosa Road as it enters Amarillo. U.S. 60 is the primary route northeast to Pampa and southwest to Hereford, and U.S. 287 veers east beyond the city, to Childress, and, beyond that, Wichita Falls and Fort Worth.

## Orientation

I-40 cuts through the heart of Amarillo, skirting the south side of downtown. The city's primary north-south artery is U.S. 87, which splits into four one-way north-south streets in the downtown area. (From the west, these streets are Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan.) South of I-40, U.S. 87 becomes I-27, which leads to Canyon and Lubbock. The northern boundary of downtown is 1st Avenue, the southern boundary I-40. The Route 66 Historic District begins at 6th Avenue and Georgia Street and continues west along 6th Avenue for a mile to Western Street. Amarillo Boulevard is a major east-west route through the northern stretch of the city. Along with Georgia Street, Ross-Mirror and Washington streets are among the busiest north-south roads in Amarillo. Loop 335 comprises four roads (Soncy Rd., FM 1719, Lakeside Dr., and Hollywood Rd.) that circumnavigate the city.

## Getting Around

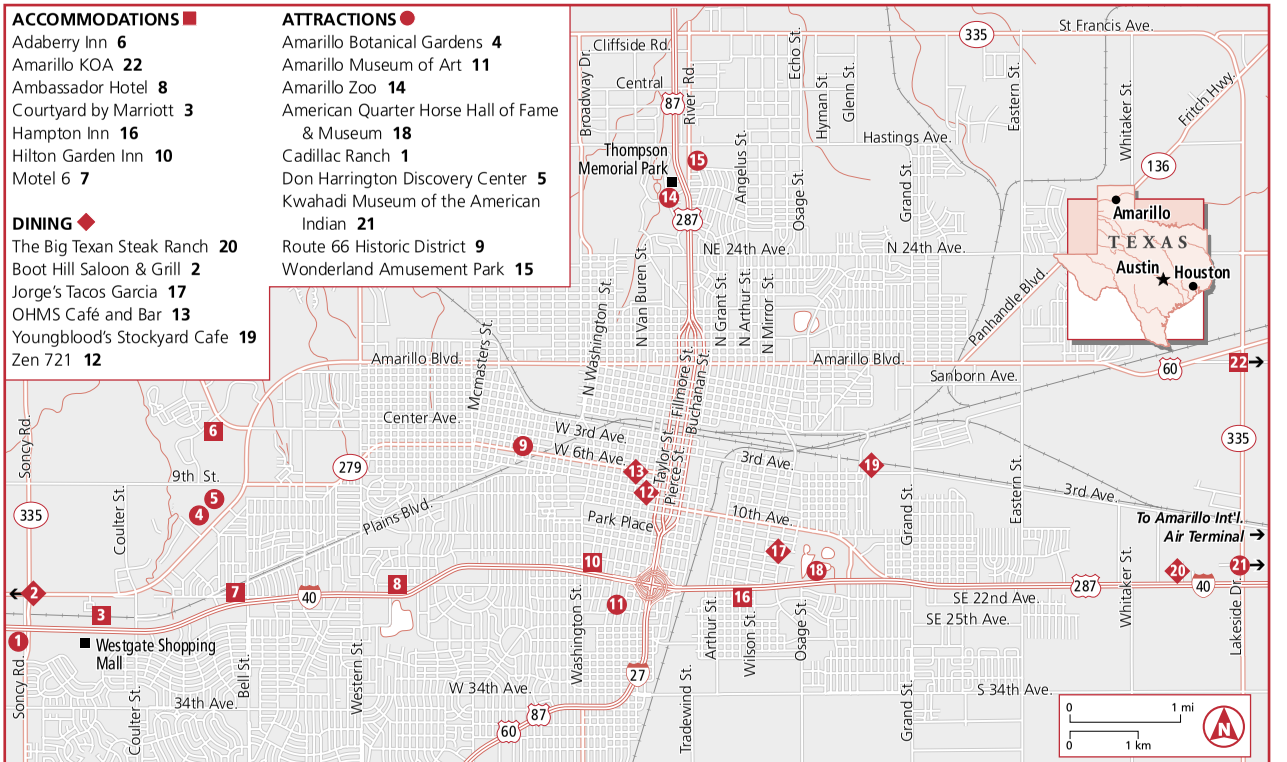
Aside from some one-way streets downtown, Amarillo is a snap to navigate by car, with relatively little traffic. (Instead of a rush hour, locals like to say they have a "rush minute.")

**Amarillo City Transit** (✆ **806/378-3095**) operates a bus system Monday through Saturday from 6:15am to 7pm. The main transfer point is located downtown at 3rd Avenue and Fillmore Street. Eight different routes run from downtown to the major shopping centers and Harrington Regional Medical Center. Ride tickets are 75¢ for adults, 60¢ for children ages 6 to 12 and students, and 35¢ for seniors and travelers with disabilities.

Taxi service is provided by **Ace's Taxi** (✆ **806/676-7263**), **Airport Taxi** (✆ **806/358-8350**), and **Bob and Son Taxi** (✆ **806/373-1171**).

## Visitor Information

The **Amarillo Convention & Visitor Council** maintains an information center at 401 S. Buchanan St. (✆ **800/692-1338** or 806/374-8474; www.visitamarillotx.com), open 7 days a week in summer, with more limited hours the rest of the year. For statewide information, visit the **Texas Travel Information Center** on the city's east side; it's located on the south frontage road just west of I-40, exit 75.


ACCOMMODATIONS
Adaberry Inn 6
Amarillo KOA 22
Ambassador Hotel 8
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**FAST FACTS** The **Northwest Texas Hospital** is at 1501 S. Coulter Dr. (✆ **806/354-1000;** www.nwtexashealthcare.com), just north of I-40 on the Harrington Regional Medical Center campus. The main **post office** is located at 2301 S. Ross St. and is open Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 6pm and Saturday from 9am to 2pm.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

### The Top Attractions

**American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum** ★ Kids Dedicated to the history of the equine breed named for its speed when racing a quarter-mile, this facility offers a comprehensive look at the animals and the culture surrounding them. Slickly renovated and expanded in 2007, the museum is geared toward horse lovers and kids—who will no doubt be delighted by the interactive exhibits and a fiberglass quarter horse replica you can climb aboard. Start with the orientation show in the modern Kenneth Banks Theater. Next, investigate the galleries, featuring an engaging chronological history of the American Quarter Horse and a peek into the physiology of these impressive beasts. If the subject matter piques your interest, expect to spend an hour or more here.

2601 I-40 E. at Quarter Horse Dr. ✆ **806/376-5181.** www.aqhhalloffame.com. Admission $6 adults, $5 seniors 55 and over, $2 children 6–18, free for children 5 and under. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; also Sun noon–5pm Memorial Day to Labor Day.

**Cadillac Ranch** ★ One of the more recognizable and bizarre roadside attractions in the country, Cadillac Ranch consists of 10 vintage Cadillacs (dating 1949–64) buried up to their back seats in a wheat field west of Amarillo, rising out of the earth at the same angle as Cheops Pyramid in Egypt. Conceived and funded by Amarillo's Stanley Marsh 3, the eccentric grandson of one of the Panhandle's most successful oilmen, Cadillac Ranch was constructed in 1974 by the Ant Farm, a San Francisco–based art collective, and relocated west in 1997 to its present site to escape the shadow of Amarillo's growth. Cadillac Ranch is also interactive: Marsh freely allows visitors to add their creative touches with spray paint, a marker, or a key. (For more on Stanley Marsh 3's artistic exploits in the Amarillo area, see "Unanticipated Rewards," p. 422)

I-40 W., on the south frontage road btw. exits 60 (Arnot Rd.) and 62 (Hope and Holiday roads). Free admission. Daily 24 hr.

**Route 66 Historic District** This colorful area west of downtown Amarillo preserves about a mile of old Route 66, aka the "Mother Road." Once a suburb accessible by trolley car, the district has evolved into a hub for the city's nightlife and shopping. Buildings that once housed drugstores and theaters are now home to eateries, antiques stores, and specialty shops. The area is a bit run-down in spots, but it's not all that touristy and it's fun as a glimpse into the glory days of Route 66. The surrounding neighborhood, known as Old San Jacinto, might have once been a suburb, but, in many ways, it is now the heart of the city. During the summer, the district hosts several festivals, with street dances, live entertainment, and art displays.

6th Ave. btw. Western and Georgia sts. Call the Amarillo CVC at ✆ **866/645-0666** for additional information. www.amarillo66.com.

### More Attractions

**Amarillo Botanical Gardens** Finds Dedicated to the art, science, and enjoyment of horticulture, these outdoor gardens feature displays on flora indigenous to the high plains region and offer a pleasant spot to take a 30-minute break from the road. Of

special note is a "scent garden" designed for patrons with sight impairments, and an attractive tropical conservatory.

1400 Streit Dr., at Harrington Regional Medical Center. ✆ **806/352-6513.** www.amarillobotanicalgardens.org. Admission $4 adults, $3 seniors 60 and older, $2 children 2–12, free for children 1 and under. Outdoor gardens daily dawn–dusk; indoor exhibits Tues–Fri 9am–5pm year-round, also Sat 10am–2pm Mar–Nov.

**Amarillo Museum of Art** The only accredited art museum within a 260-mile radius, this institution houses a worthwhile collection of paintings, photographic exhibits, and sculptures in its galleries. Requiring about 30 minutes to peruse, the permanent collection includes a good deal of regional 20th-century art and a nice Asian exhibit, thanks to a local patron with a passion for Far Eastern works. The museum hosts nearly 20 changing exhibits annually in its six galleries; recent programs included works by Georgia O'Keeffe, a former area resident, and displays that use art as a lens to explore the area's colorful history.

2200 S. Van Buren St., on the campus of Amarillo College. ✆ **806/371-5050.** www.amarilloart.org. Free admission. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm (until 9pm Thurs); Sat–Sun 1–5pm. Closed major holidays.

**Amarillo Zoo** This small accredited zoo excels at preserving and displaying the High Plains' indigenous animals, termed "Texotic." The highlight is a 20-acre range populated by grazing bison; the mustang, the feral horse of the American West, is also in the collection, as are mountain lions, Texas longhorns, snakes, and spider monkeys. In all, the zoo is a good half-hour stop for families with children who've been cooped up in the back seat for far too long.

NE 24th and Fillmore sts., Thompson Memorial Park, about 1 mile north of downtown on U.S. 287. ✆ **806/381-7911.** www.amarillozoo.org. Free admission (donations accepted). Tues–Sun 9:30am–5:30pm. Closed major holidays.

**Don Harrington Discovery Center** (Kids) The Texas Panhandle's preeminent children's science museum, the Discovery Center is home to more than 60 permanent displays, including an eye-popping exhibit on turbulent weather patterns and Tiny Town, a play area for kids 4 and under. The center is also home to the innovative Space Theater, an all-digital system that shows a variety of productions. Out front is the space-age Helium Monument, composed of four helium-filled steel columns.

1200 Streit Dr. ✆ **806/355-9547.** www.dhdc.org. Admission $5.50 adults, $5 students and seniors, $4.50 children 3–12, free for children 2 and under. Tues–Sat 9:30am–4:30pm; Sun noon–4:30pm. Closed major holidays.

**Kwahadi Museum of the American Indian** At once a museum and a dance theater, this attractive facility presents the story of the people native to the Panhandle through art and culture. Inside a Pueblo-inspired building, author and artist Thomas Mails's collection of paintings and artifacts is presented; out front, Kwahadi Dancers take to the stage for regular performances. Most performances are on summer weekend nights at 7:30pm with ticket prices of $4 to $6.

9151 I-40 E. ✆ **806/335-3175.** www.kwahadi.com. Admission $3 adults, $1.50 children. Summer Wed–Sun 11am–5pm, 11am–10pm on show days; winter Sat–Sun 1–5pm, 1–10pm on show days. Call for the current schedule of the Kwahadi Dancers.

**Wonderland Amusement Park** (Kids) An Amarillo landmark since the glory days of Route 66, Wonderland is the Panhandle's top amusement park, featuring more than 25 different nostalgic rides on a 15-acre chunk of Thompson Park. The amusements

## Unanticipated Rewards

**Cadillac Ranch** (p. 420) is just the tip of Amarillo 's public art iceberg, which is in large part the product of the fervent imagination of Stanley Marsh 3 (he favors the Arabic "3" over the Roman "III").

The grandson of an early Texas oil millionaire, Marsh is also the man behind 200 signs on display at Amarillo homes and businesses. Looking very much like colorful municipal signs, they don't dispense traffic or parking rules, instead offering a variety of offbeat slogans. One reads "Strong drink." "What is a village without village idiots?" asks another. "'Either the well is very deep,' thought Alice, 'or I'm falling very slowly,'" reads yet another. While the signs are spread out around Amarillo and the surrounding towns, Old San Jacinto is the neighborhood where you'll see them in the highest concentration. The ever-enigmatic Marsh explained the signs, saying, "They are to be looked at. The signs are just there, like the Rock of Gibraltar or the Statue of Liberty. They are a system of unanticipated rewards."

Beyond Cadillac Ranch and the signs, Marsh's eccentric public art vision extends to the southern fringes of Lubbock, to the rural junction of I-27 and Sundown Lane, where a sculpture of a pair of disembodied legs greets passerby. (An absurd plaque explains that they are all that remains of a great statue of Ozymandias, "damaged by students from Lubbock after losing to Amarillo in a competition.") There's also "Floating Mesa," hundreds of sheets of plywood painted the color of a blue sky on the side of a mountain. Unless it is overcast, the resulting impression is that the summit is floating. It is located about 8 miles northwest of Amarillo on the west side of Tascosa Road.

While many are amused by the creations of Stanley Marsh 3, not every Amarillo resident finds them in good taste. Those disgusted by their presence have decried them as eyesores with little or no artistic value. In response, Marsh was once quoted as saying, "Art is a legalized form of insanity, and I do it very well."

include three roller coasters, six water rides, a carousel, and several kiddie rides. My favorites: the double-loop "Texas Tornado" coaster and the "Shoot the Chute" water ride. There is also a minigolf course and an arcade.

2601 Dumas Dr., at Thompson Memorial Park. ✆ **800/383-4712** or 806/383-3344. www.wonderlandpark.com. Individual rides $1.50 each plus a $5 gate admission fee. Unlimited rides $13–$16 weeknights, $18–$22 weekends. Apr to Labor Day Sat–Sun 1–10pm; May Tues and Thurs–Fri 6:30–9:30pm; June to mid-Aug Mon–Fri 7–10pm. Closed Labor Day to Mar.

## Outdoor Activities

Amarillo offers many opportunities for outdoor recreation, in the form of in-city golf courses, pools, and parks, as well as several lakes, reservoirs, and state parks in the surrounding area. The best recreation spot is **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** (see "Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park," later in this chapter), about 27 miles southeast of the city.

The **Lake Meredith National Recreation Area** (✆ **806/857-3151;** www.nps.gov/lamr), located 38 miles northeast of Amarillo via Tex. 136, is another outdoor hot spot,

featuring opportunities for boating, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, camping, hiking, swimming, scuba diving, wildlife and bird viewing, and four-wheeling. The site is also home to **Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument** (www.nps.gov/alfl), the point of origin for a significant percentage of arrowhead points and flint tools found throughout the Great Plains. While the monument is closed to most recreational activity, guided tours are offered at 10am and 2pm during the summer and at other times of the year by reservation. Aside from boat-launching fees, access to Lake Meredith is free to the public.

**Wildcat Bluff Nature Center,** 2301 N. Soncy Rd. (✆ **806/352-6007;** www.wildcatbluff.org), is the best spot for hiking and wildlife viewing in the city itself, offering over 2 miles of moderate trails on its 600 acres of cottonwood-shaded hills. The center's wildlife population includes mule deer, horned toads, coyotes, and turkey vultures. Admission is $3 adults and $2 for kids and seniors.

The major city parks in Amarillo include **Thompson Memorial Park,** at Dumas Drive and 24th Avenue, home to Wonderland Amusement Park and the Amarillo Zoo, as well as a 36-hole golf course, 1 mile of jogging/walking trails, a heated outdoor pool (open seasonally), ball fields, picnic sites with grills, and fishing ponds; **John S. Stiff Memorial Park,** at SW 48th Avenue and Bell Street, with ball fields, three indoor and eight outdoor tennis courts, an outdoor heated pool, and picnic sites; and **Southeast Regional Park,** at SE 46th Avenue and Osage Street, with an outdoor heated pool, ball fields, fishing ponds, and picnic areas. For more information on Amarillo's city parks, contact the Parks and Recreation Department at ✆ **806/378-3036** or visit **www.amarilloparks.org**.

**BOATING** **Lake Meredith National Recreation Area** is the Panhandle's top watersports destination. When full, the main lake occupies 12,000 of the area's 46,000 acres and draws in boaters, windsurfers, water-skiers, and even scuba divers. Boat rentals (from personal watercraft to houseboats) are available from **Forever Resorts** (✆ **806/865-3391;** www.marinaatlakemeredith.com) at the marina at Lake Meredith National Recreation Area. To launch a boat of any size into Lake Meredith, a $4 day-use fee is required ($10 for 3 days).

**FISHING** Catfish and bass are the fish of choice for anglers in the Texas Panhandle, and several spots in and around Amarillo are quite popular. For no fee outside of the cost of a Texas state fishing license, visitors can fish in several ponds in Amarillo's city park system, including **Thompson Memorial Park** at Dumas Drive and 24th Avenue, **Martin Road Park** at NE 15th Avenue and Mirror Street, **Southeast Regional Park** at SE 46th Avenue and Osage Street, and **Harrington Regional Medical Center Park** at SW 9th Avenue and Wallace Street. **Lake Meredith National Recreation Area** is another popular fishing spot for the Panhandle. At the lake's **marina** (✆ **806/865-3391;** www.marinaatlakemeredith.com), patrons find basic fishing supplies, concessions, and a heated and cooled fishing house ($4 for 12 hr.). Fishing licenses can be obtained at local Wal-Marts and sporting-good stores, including Big 5 Sporting Goods, 8004 I-40 W. (✆ **806/356-8115**).

**Ggolf** The City of Amarillo Parks and Recreation Department manages four golf courses: two at **Comanche Trail,** 4200 S. Grand St. (✆ **806/378-4281;** www.comanchetrail.com), with greens fees for 18 holes of $11 to $15; and two at **Ross Rogers Golf Course,** 722 NE 24th Ave. in Thompson Memorial Park (✆ **806/378-3086**), with greens fees of $15 to $21. At both courses, carts are $24 for 18 holes.

**HIKING** Aside from the hiking opportunities at **Wildcat Bluff Nature Center,** there are two hiking trails at **Lake Meredith National Recreation Area.** The Devil's Canyon Trail is a moderate one-way trail that leaves from Plum Creek on the north side of the lake and continues into the canyon for 1.5 miles. In city limits, the **Rock Island Rail Trail** runs from Coulter Street on the west side to 7th and Crockett streets near downtown, 4 miles of jogging/biking/walking terrain in all. Numerous foot trails also traverse **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** (see "Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park," later in this chapter).

**HORSEBACK RIDING** There are several horse-friendly trails in **Lake Meredith National Recreation Area,** in McBride Canyon and alongside Plum Creek on the lake's north side. The National Park Service provides corrals at the Plum Creek and Mullinaw campgrounds, but riders need to bring their own horses. **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** also has horse trails and stables (see "Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park," later in this chapter).

**MOUNTAIN BIKING** The closest mountain biking trails to Amarillo are 27 miles away in **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** (see "Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park," later in this chapter). The 3-mile Devil's Canyon Trail at **Lake Meredith National Recreation Area** (see "Hiking," above) is also accessible to mountain bikers.

## Spectator Sports

**BASEBALL** The **Amarillo 'Dillas** play in the United League at the Amarillo National Bank Dilla Villa, 3300 3rd St. on the north side of the Tri-State Fairgrounds (✆ **806/342-0400**). The schedule runs from May to August with single-game ticket prices ranging from $4 to $6.

**RACING** Motor-sports enthusiasts can get a fix of racing action at **Route 66 Motor Speedway,** located about 10 miles east of downtown Amarillo at 3601 E. Amarillo Blvd. (✆ **806/381-7223;** www.route66motorspeedway.com). The oval dirt track is a half-mile long. Races are held on Saturday nights from April to September; admission is $7 to $25.

**RODEO** The Working Ranch Cowboys Association (WRCA) holds its annual **World Championship Ranch Rodeo** in Amarillo during the second week of November. Real working cowboys compete in such events as wild-cow milking, bronco riding, and team penning at the Amarillo Civic Center, 401 S. Buchanan St. (✆ **806/378-3096** for tickets; www.wrca.org). In late November, there's **Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association World Finals** (✆ **480/683-0485;** www.cowboymountedshooting.com), with marksmen on horseback testing their skills. Several other major equestrian events are held in town during the fall and winter; contact the **Amarillo CVC** (✆ **800/692-1338**) for details.

## Shopping

Amarillo's biggest enclosed shopping center is the **Westgate Shopping Mall,** 7701 I-40 W., between the Coulter Drive and Soncy Road exits (✆ **806/358-7221;** www.westgatemalltx.com). The mall's stores include Dillard's, Gap, and Sears, as well as a movie theater and several restaurants. Westgate is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm, and Sunday from noon to 6pm. The **Historic Route 66 District** is an antiques buff's dream, with more than 100 stores on West 6th Avenue between Georgia and Western streets. New upscale retailers have staked a claim to **South Soncy Road.** Western wear is also big in Amarillo; head to **Cavender's Boot City,** 7920 I-40 W. at Coulter Drive (✆ **806/358-1400**), for a huge selection of boots, along with hats, belt buckles, jeans, jewelry, and practically every other Western wearable on the market.

## WHERE TO STAY

Amarillo's location on I-40 makes it an ideal stopping point on cross-country trips. Several inexpensive mom-and-pop motels line Amarillo Boulevard (Loop 335) in northern Amarillo, but finding a good room in that area is a hit-or-miss proposition. A better bet is the I-40 corridor: You'll find dozens of chain motels located just off the interstate, including **Courtyard by Marriott,** 8006 I-40 W. (✆ **800/321-2211** or 806/467-8954), with rates of $129 to $159 double; **Hampton Inn,** 1700 I-40 E. at exit 71 (✆ **800/426-7866** or 806/372-1425), with rates of $89 to $129 double; **Hilton Garden Inn,** 900 I-40 W. (✆ **800/321-3232** or 806/355-4400), with rates of $139 to $169 double; and **Motel 6,** 6030 I-40 W. at exit 66 (✆ **800/466-8356** or 806/359-7651), with rates of $40 to $60 double. Room taxes in Amarillo add about 15% to lodging bills.

**Adaberry Inn ★★** (Finds) Constructed from scratch in 1997, the Adaberry Inn rose to national prominence when it served as Oprah Winfrey's home for 2 months in 1999 while she fought a defamation lawsuit brought on by Amarillo-area cattle ranchers. One look inside this thoroughly modern B&B and it's easy to see why the TV talk show star chose to stay here. The uniquely decorated rooms are each themed after a particular city: Missoula features a Western motif, with cowboy hats, barn doors under the sink, and a mountainous mural on one wall; and Key West offers a more tropical setting with aquatic artwork, a latticed ceiling, and yellow walls. The best, though, is the Aspen suite (Oprah's room), which features a rock fireplace, a Jacuzzi for two, and ski-themed decorative touches.

Seven of the rooms have private balconies or patios. There's also a game room with a putting green and a pool table downstairs, adjacent to a state-of-the-art home theater. The inn's main balcony is an ideal place to watch sunsets over the Lost Canyon, a quiet wildlife refuge with walking trails right in the Adaberry's backyard. Smoking and pets are not permitted inside of the inn.

6818 Plum Creek Dr., Amarillo, TX 79124. ✆ **806/352-0022.** Fax 806/356-0248. www.adaberryinn.com. 9 units. $125 double; $195 suite. Rates include full breakfast and complimentary snacks and beverages. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Children 13 and over accepted. **Amenities:** Exercise room; game room; in-room massage; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, cable TV/VCR, complimentary Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Ambassador Hotel ★★** The 10-story Ambassador is Amarillo's tallest hotel. It's also the city's best, a pleasant touch of class in cowboy country, featuring stately European interiors accented by Texan style, with plenty of basket-weave wood, granite, and tooled leather. The 9th and 10th floors make up the concierge level, with brass fixtures, minibars, and complimentary breakfast and cocktails. Many of the upper rooms have great views of the pleasantly treed cityscape below—those facing east are the best in this regard. Decorated with gallery-caliber art and maps, the lobby is striking—a five-story atrium with a sloping glass enclosure over an excellent cafe and a small pool—and the service and amenities are the best in town.

3100 I-40 W. (exit 68B on Georgia St.), Amarillo, TX 79102. ✆ **800/817-0521** or 806/385-9869. Fax 806/385-9869. www.ambassadoramarillo.com. 265 units, including 3 suites. $129–$169 double; $249–$449 suite. Specials of up to 50% off often available. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; indoor heated pool; privileges at a nearby health club; exercise room; indoor Jacuzzi; concierge; courtesy car; business center; limited room service; laundry service/dry cleaning; executive level. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies and Nintendo, complimentary Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## Camping

Several camping options exist in and around Amarillo, with numerous RV campgrounds in the city as well as primitive camping opportunities at Lake Meredith National Recreation Area (see "Outdoor Activities," above). The recreation area does not have RV

 hookups, but it's free to stay here. See also "Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park," below.

**Amarillo KOA** Located in a secluded spot near the airport on Amarillo's eastern fringe, this campground is well maintained and reliable. Facilities include a pet walk, a heated outdoor pool, free Wi-Fi, a playground, a game room, and a gift shop with sundries and RV supplies. Also, a chuck wagon dinner is served nightly during the summer.

1100 Folsom Rd., Amarillo, TX 79108. ✆ **800/562-3431** (reservations only) or 806/335-1792. Fax 806/335-3702. www.koa.com. 123 sites, including 58 pull-throughs, 26 back-ins, 23 tent sites, and 5 cabins. $27–$37 campsites; $55–$70 cabins. DISC, MC, V. Located east of Lakeside Dr. (I-40 exit 75) via U.S. 60.

## WHERE TO DINE

There are numerous restaurants and bars in the 700 block of **South Polk Street** in Amarillo, with options ranging from Mexican to Asian to pub grub. In Vega, 35 miles west of Amarillo, I like **Boot Hill Saloon & Grill,** 909 Vega Blvd. (✆ **806/267-2904;** www.boothillvega.com), an eatery that looks straight from the Old West but was built in 2007. The menu features both steaks and sandwiches, plus pastas, seafood, and baby back ribs ($10–$25).

**The Big Texan Steak Ranch** ★ Kids STEAK It is next to impossible to miss the Big Texan when you drive across the Panhandle on I-40: You'll see the first billboards touting the legendary deal—Eat a 72-ounce steak dinner in an hour and get it for free!—hours before you get to the restaurant. Beyond the hype, the Big Texan is a unique attraction in itself, with a gift shop, a motel ($55–$90 for a double), an old-fashioned shooting gallery, and an extensive collection of taxidermy and kitsch. Costumed cowboy musicians perform every night, and dancing is a regular happening in the summer.

With so much going on, you might forget that the Big Texan is a restaurant, but its legendary steaks are what put the place on the map: They're actually quite good. Beyond the 72-ouncer (which, not so incidentally, sports a $72 price tag if you don't finish it), the restaurant also serves juicy prime rib, rib-eye, New York strip, and other steaks in a dinner that includes salad, bread, and two side dishes. A smattering of seafood and barbecue dishes also delights diners. Breakfast and lunch are comparable: all-American and ultrahearty.

For the record, some 60,000 people have tried to eat the 72-ounce steak since its introduction in 1959, and about 8,500 have succeeded. One, a wrestler named Klondike Bill, inhaled two of the dinners in the 1-hour time limit, and a competitive eater finished one in under 9 minutes.

7701 I-40 E. ✆ **800/657-7177** or 806/372-6000. www.bigtexan.com. Reservations accepted for large parties only. Main courses $5–$16 breakfast, $8.50–$40 lunch and dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10:30pm.

**Jorge's Tacos Garcia** TEX-MEX Jorge's proprietor, George Veloz II, dreamed of opening a Tex-Mex restaurant since he was in middle school. Fittingly, Jorge's Tacos Garcia is the spitting image of his childhood vision, right down to the fountain out front. The "West Texas Tex-Mex" and New Mexican recipes are time-tested at Jorge's, from a family that has been in the restaurant business for half of a century. I like the batter-free *rellenos;* the *enchiladas de chile verde,* made with blue corn tortillas and topped with green chile; and the *taquitos de barbacoa,* grilled tacos loaded with "Mexican barbecue." Fans of the Mexican specialty *menudo* can indulge themselves with Jorge's special recipe anytime

the restaurant is open. There are also a dozen combination plates, seafood dishes, daily specials, and a kids' menu.

1100 S. Ross St. ✆ **806/371-0411.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6–$14. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon 10:30am–9:30pm; Tues–Sat 10:30am–10pm; Sun 10:30am–3:30pm.

**OHMS Café and Bar** ★ ECLECTIC This is my pick for a lunch spot. The chalkboard menu changes daily at this pleasant downtown eatery, which doubles as a gallery for local artists. (Incidentally, OHMS stands for "On Her Majesty's Service," so named by the former owner, a native of the United Kingdom.) Lunch is served cafeteria-style, with such regular offerings as a very British—and very good—shepherd's pie, linguine with fresh basil and brie, and herbed baked chicken, all with soup or salad (with tasty homemade dressings) and fresh bread. Dinner brings table service and higher prices, and healthier fare than the Amarillo norm; likely selections are pan-seared wild salmon, rosemary-mustard pork loin, bison steaks, and elk tenderloin. Wine Lovers Wednesdays feature tapas matched with flights of wine. The art on display changes monthly, and live acoustic music is featured on a regular basis.

619 S. Tyler St. ✆ **806/373-3233.** www.ohmscafe.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6–$9 lunch, $15–$30 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–1:30pm; Wed–Sat 6–10pm. Bar open later.

**Youngblood's Stockyard Cafe** Finds AMERICAN Whereas the Big Texan is kitschy and Disney-esque, the Stockyard Cafe is the real deal: Diners just don't get any more cowboy than this. Tucked away at the site of one of the largest livestock auctions in the world, this restaurant is smoky, old-fashioned, and furnished with cowhides, burlap, and the requisite taxidermy. But it's the food that keeps those cattlemen coming, from the simple and fresh American breakfasts to the steaks, hamburgers, and sandwiches at lunch. Dinnertime in Amarillo means more steaks, and the Stockyard Cafe is no exception, serving the chicken-fried variety and 8-ounce sirloins. Everything on the menu is fresh and Texas-size.

100 S. Manhattan St., in the Amarillo Livestock Auction Bldg. ✆ **806/374-6024.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses $4–$12. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30am–2pm; Fri 5–8:30pm.

**Zen 721** ★ ASIAN FUSION An unexpectedly urbane eatery in downtown Amarillo, Zen 721 eschews longhorn skulls, beer signs, and Texas flags for red velvet, minimalist Asian art, and industrial chic, to good effect. Thanks to good service and creative fare from the open kitchen, the restaurant quickly became a local favorite after opening in 2003. The menu has a few nods to French and Mexican cuisine, but relies on such Asian standards as sushi and yakitori skewers, and entrees such as seared soy-glazed sea bass, wok-flashed stir-fry, and pepper-crusted beef strip over rice and fresh vegetables.

614 S. Polk St. ✆ **806/372-1909.** www.zen721.com. Reservations accepted. Main courses $7–$14 lunch, $10–$26 dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–1:45pm; Tues–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm. Bar open later.

## AMARILLO AFTER DARK

### The Performing Arts

The best places to check for performing arts events in Amarillo are **www.artsinamarillo.com** and **www.panhandletickets.com**.

**Amarillo Little Theatre,** 2019 Civic Circle (✆ **806/355-9991;** www.amarillolittletheatre.org), produces about 10 plays a year at two theaters southwest of downtown. The Mainstage focuses on musicals and lighter fare, whereas the Adventure Space produces

edgier, adult-oriented fare. Recent productions have included *Dracula, Smokey Joe's Cafe,* and *The Rabbit Hole.* Ticket prices range from $10 to $19.

The **Amarillo Opera** (✆ **806/372-7464;** www.amarilloopera.org) produces two main-stage operas annually, one each in the fall and spring, and an annual spirituals concert on the first weekend of every February. The performances take place at the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts, 400 S. Buchanan St., and tickets are priced from $25 to $100. The **Amarillo Symphony** (✆ **806/376-8782;** www.amarillosymphony.org) performs classical and pops concerts year-round, also at the Globe-News Center; tickets for most concerts cost between $12 and $50.

**Lone Star Ballet** (✆ **806/372-2463;** www.lonestarballet.org) presents a season of local and guest performances from October to April at the Globe-News Center. The local company produces *The Nutcracker* annually on the second weekend of December, and occasionally performs joint performances with the Amarillo Symphony. Tickets are $13 to $35.

### Nightclubs & Bars

The main nightlife district in Amarillo is **South Polk Street** downtown, between 7th and 8th avenues. **Bodega's,** 709 S. Polk St. (✆ 806/378-5790), is a chic wine bar and jazz club. **Butlers Martini Lounge,** 703 S. Polk St. (✆ 806/376-8180), and a music venue, the **Mayfair Club,** 701 S. Polk (✆ 806/367-9641), are other slick standbys on the block. Rough and raw, the **Golden Light Cafe & Cantina,** 2908 W. 6th Ave. (✆ 806/374-9237; www.goldenlightcafe.com), is a Route 66 landmark, open since 1946 with a grill and oodles of nostalgia. For country-and-western fans, there's **Midnight Rodeo,** 4400 S. Georgia St. (✆ 806/358-7083; www.midnightrodeoamarillo.com), featuring a gargantuan dance floor centered on an oval bar. Another good venue for live music—primarily country—is the hubcap-laden **Route 66 Roadhouse,** 609 S. Independence St. (✆ 806/355-7399), which also has pool tables and dartboards.



## 2 CANYON & PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK ★

16 miles S of Amarillo; 103 miles N of Lubbock

Founded as Canyon City in 1889, Canyon takes its name from the spectacular Palo Duro Canyon, which lies 12 miles to the west. The nomadic prehorse tribes of Apaches first inhabited the region, but by the 18th century Comanche and Kiowa horsemen used the canyon as a major campground. By the late 19th century, white ranchers began grazing cattle in the area: Charles Goodnight, the inventor of the chuck wagon, drove a herd into Palo Duro Canyon in 1876 and established the JA Ranch.

Today a city of 13,000 residents, Canyon is known primarily as the gateway to Palo Duro Canyon State Park and the home of West Texas State A&M University. The town is a good base camp for those who want to explore Palo Duro Canyon but don't want to spend their nights in a tent. The community also has a charming small-town vibe, and much of its colorful history is presented at the excellent Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

### ESSENTIALS

#### Getting There & Getting Around

Canyon is located immediately south of the junction of I-27 and U.S. 87, about 16 miles south of downtown Amarillo. Once entering town, U.S. 87 becomes 23rd Street, one of

### Tips Texas

More than three million people have attended the musical drama *Texas!* since performances began in 1966, making it the nation's biggest outdoor drama. It's been updated as ***Texas,*** a spectacle of choreography and song covering the Panhandle's storied past. Staged at Pioneer Amphitheatre in Palo Duro Canyon State Park, the 2-hour play takes place Tuesday through Saturday from early June to mid-August at 8:30pm. For tickets, call ✆ **806/655-2181** or visit **www.texas-show.com**. Adult tickets range from $12 to $28; those for children 11 and under are $7.50 to $24. For an extra $16 ($12 for children), attendees can partake of a steak dinner at 6pm. The admission fee to Palo Duro Canyon State Park is waived at 5:30pm for all *Texas* ticket holders.

Canyon's main commercial thoroughfares. Tex. 217, which runs east-west, becomes 4th Avenue in town and is accessible via I-27, exit 106; head west 2 miles to get to Canyon proper or east 10 miles to get to Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

Canyon's small size makes it impossible to get lost. The streets run north-south and begin at 1st at the west side of town. The avenues run east-west and begin numerically in the north.

## Visitor Information

Open from 9am to 4:30pm weekdays, the **Canyon Chamber of Commerce,** 1518 5th Ave., Canyon, TX 79015 ( ✆ **806/655-7815;** www.canyonchamber.org), can provide visitors with information and maps.

**FAST FACTS** The closest hospitals are located 16 miles north in Amarillo, including **Northwest Texas Hospital,** 1501 S. Coulter Dr. (✆ **806/354-1000**). The **post office** is at 1304 4th Ave., open Monday through Friday from 9am to 4:30pm.

# WHAT TO SEE & DO

## The Top Attractions

**Palo Duro Canyon State Park** ★★ Moments The 60-mile Palo Duro Canyon, sculpted by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River over the past 90 million years, presents a grand contrast to the ubiquitous treeless plains of the Texas Panhandle. Its 800-foot cliffs, striped with layers of orange, red, and white rock and adorned by groves of juniper and cottonwood trees, present a stark beauty that make this the preeminent state park in all of Texas. Simply put, it is the one "can't miss" natural attraction in the region. Palo Duro, which is Spanish for "hardwood," is a geology buff's dream: The base of the canyon is walled by red shales and sandstones from the Permian period (ca. 250 million b.c.); these are topped by colorful Triassic shales and sandstones; and the top of the canyon is made of a pastiche of stones only a few million years old. Of the 200 species of animals that venture into the canyon, you're most likely to see mule deer and wild turkeys. There's also the famed Pioneer Amphitheatre, the venue for the musical drama *Texas;* several hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails; and a visitor center/museum/bookstore with interpretive exhibits on the canyon's formation, history, and wildlife.

## Old Route 66

The ghosts of speed demons behind the wheels of phant om hot r ods, torching the high way bet ween Chicago and L os Angeles , still cruise nor thern Texas's stretch of the fabled "Mother Road." How ever, the c onstruction of I-40, completed in 1984 on a similar c ourse as Rout e 66, irr evocably changed the landscape of cross-country travel. What was once Route 66 is now a patchwork of ser vice r oads, t wo-lane high ways, and inac cessible stretches of dir t. As the interstate defined the c ourse of the past sev eral decades of dev elopment, many of the t owns thr ough which Rout e 66 onc e snaked lost a fair shar e of commercial traffic, but hor des of nostalg ic tra velers ha ve g iven man y of the old and offbeat r oadside landmarks a much-needed boost in r ecent y ears.

### OLD ROUTE 66 HIGHLIGHTS

Established in 1890 b y an I rish sheep rancher , **Shamrock,** 100 miles east of Amarillo via I-40, is home t o the **U Drop Inn,** located at the junc tion of U.S. 83 and Old Rout e 66. Built in 1936, this ser vice station/coffee shop is one of the earliest examples of Ar t Deco architecture on the Texas plains. The motel was totally restored and reopened in 2004 as the home of the **Shamrock Chamber of C ommerce** (✆ **806/256-2501;** w ww.shamrocktx.net). A side fr om the U Drop Inn, the **Pioneer West Historical Museum,** 204 N. M adden St. (✆ **806/56-3941**), is the prime t ourist st op, with 25 r ooms in the r estored Reynolds Hotel (1925) devoted to historical artifacts and other displays. It's open Tuesday through F riday fr om 10am t o noon and 1 t o 3pm, although hours ar e somewhat erratic; admission is fr ee, but donations ar e accepted. Also, come March 17, Shamr ock hosts a liv ely St. P atrick's Da y c elebration, with a str eet fair , a parade, and other f estivities. Shamr ock has a number of r estaurants and motels, including the **Irish Inn,** 301 I-40 E. ( ✆ **806/256-2106**), with double rates from $50 to $80, including a hot buffet breakfast.

11450 Park Rd. 5, C anyon, TX 79015. ✆ **806/488-2227.** w ww.palodurocanyon.com. Day use $4 adults , free for children 12 and under . Additional f ees for campsit es (see "Camping," belo w). G ates open daily 8am–10pm. 12 miles west of Canyon via Tex. 217.

**Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum** ★★ Finds The largest histor y museum in the entire state, the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum is anything but a dusty collection of spurs and bits. Well thought out, engaging, and informative, the facility stands out as the top museum in the Panhandle (and all of West Texas, for that matter) because it comprehensively co vers so many subjects under one r oof. "People of the P lains" is a comprehensive history of the Panhandle's inhabitants, offering a glimpse into how people have adapted to the past and present challenges of water, food, and climate. The museum is largely hands-on and interactiv e: You can sit in a M ustang and listen to B uddy Holly tunes or tr y out a sidesaddle. O ther wings co ver the r egion's histor y in terms of petr oleum, art, transportation, Western heritage, paleontology, geology, and American Indian art. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

In the small t own of **McLean,** 16 miles w est of Shamr ock, y ou'll find the **Devil's Rope Museum,** at the junc tion of Old Rout e 66 and K ingsley Str eet (✆ **806/779-2225;** w ww.barbwiremuseum.com), a c onverted S ears bra factory now home t o displays on the hist ory and ev olution of both barbed wir e and Route 66. It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and 10am to 4pm (shorter hours in inclement w eather) with admission by donation.

The t own of **Groom,** 25 miles w est of M cLean, is the home of one of the largest crosses in the world: the **Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ,** located off of I-40, exit 119 ( ✆ **806/665-7788;** w ww.crossministries.net). With about 1,000 visitors st opping daily, the 190-f oot, 1,250-t on cr oss is truly monolithic . If for nothing else, cross-country travelers should stop to admire its sheer size.

Just east of Gr oom is another Rout e 66 landmark : the **Leaning Tower of Texas,** a water tower intentionally built to slant with one set each of shor t and long legs and the last remaining vestige of a long-gone truck stop. As with the cross in Groom and Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, fans of roadside attractions will want to stop for this peculiar photo op.

By far the biggest Texas city on Old Rout e 66, **Amarillo** still houses a nic ely preserved str etch of the r estored high way in its **Route 66 Historic Distric t**, between Western and Georgia streets on West 6th Avenue (p. 420.)

About 45 miles w est of Amarillo is the tin y town of **Adrian,** known as the "Midpoint of Rout e 66." The appropriately named **MidPoint Cafe** on Rout e 66 (✆ **806/538-6379;** w ww.midpointroute66cafe.com), a fa vorite of t ourists, cowboys, and bikers alike , is a friendly diner open daily in the summer (8:30am–4pm Mon–Fri and 8:30am–3pm M on–Fri) and wint er (8:30am–2pm). The cafe is bedecked with Route 66 memorabilia and shelves of souvenirs, and the menu includes hear ty American br eakfasts, bur gers with the w orks, and daily specials, with most main courses coming in at $6 to $10.

2503 4th Ave., on the campus of West Texas State A&M Univ ersity. ✆ **806/651-2244.** www.panhandleplains.org. Admission $10 adults, $9 seniors, $5 children 4–12, free for children 3 and under. Sept–May Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; June–Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; year-round Sun 1–6pm. Closed major holidays.

## Outdoor Activities

**GOLF** **Palo D uro C reek,** 50 Countr y Club D r. (✆ **806/655-1106**), is an 18-hole course open to the public 365 days a y ear. Greens fees are $15 to $20 for 18 holes, and $24 for a cart.

**HIKING** With 25 miles of trails, **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** is the best hiking spot in the entir e Texas P anhandle. The most popular hike is to see the **Lighthouse,** an impressive "hoodoo" rock formation so named because of its to wering appearance. The Lighthouse is accessible by two trails: Lighthouse Trail, a moderate 5.75-mile round-trip; or R unning Trail, a mor e str enuous 11-mile r ound-trip that r uns thr ough gullies and flats, and over a ridge. Both trail heads begin near the H ackberry Camp Area.

**HORSEBACK RIDING** Many of the trails in **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** are horse-friendly, including the aforementioned Lighthouse Trail. Several equestrian campsites can also be found in the park. For those who do not have a horse of their own, **Old West Stables,** located inside the park (✆ **806/488-2180**), offers 1-hour guided tours on horseback for $35.

**MOUNTAIN BIKING** Mountain bikes are permitted—and quite popular—on the myriad trails in **Palo Duro Canyon State Park.** However, bike rentals are not available in Canyon or Amarillo, so bringing your own is a prerequisite.

## WHERE TO STAY

Canyon has a few mom-and-pop motels and a few B&Bs. For reliability and convenience, I like the **Best Western Canyon Inn & Suites,** 2801 4th Ave. (✆ **800/937-8376** or 806/655-1818), which has an indoor pool and exercise room. Double rates are $87.

**Hudspeth House ★** This three-story B&B was a "kit home" ordered from a company back East, assembled in 1909, then relocated to its present location in 1913. The inn takes its name from a teacher at the college that became West Texas State A&M University, Miss Mary Elizabeth Hudspeth, a friend of Georgia O'Keeffe who also taught at the school in the 1910s. (The famed artist was a frequent dinner guest at the house in her time.) Outside, a shady wraparound porch and colorful gardens invite guests into a lively and elegant parlor. All of the rooms are uniquely decorated, and two are third-floor lofts; I like the spare woodsy charm of Benjamin's Cabin, and the large and stylish comfort of James' Loft.

1905 4th Ave., Canyon, TX 79015. ✆ **800/655-9809** or 806/655-9800. w www.hudspethinn.com. 8 units. $85–$145 double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. *In room:* A/C, TV, complimentary Wi-Fi.

### Camping

**Palo Duro Canyon State Park** The park offers a wide variety of camping options, from primitive backpacking sites accessible only by foot to standard RV sites with water and electrical hookups. Several of the camping areas have showers and restrooms, as well as a dump station. For more substantial supplies, you'll want to hit a grocery store in Canyon first. The seven rustic, mission-style cabins were built in the 1930s, and since renovated. They can sleep two to four people and have varied facilities; they have no kitchens, but there are grills out front. Pets are permitted at all of the sites, but they must remain leashed at all times.

11450 Park Rd. 5, Canyon, TX 79015. ✆ **806/488-2227,** or 512/389-8900 for reservations. 100 sites, including 7 pull-throughs, 75 back-ins, and 18 tent sites. Additional primitive sites, equestrian sites, and 7 cabins available. $12–$22 campsites; $60–$125 cabins. DISC, MC, V. Located 12 miles east of Canyon via Tex. 217.

## WHERE TO DINE

A local favorite, **Pepito's,** 408 23rd St. (✆ **806/655-4736**), is a solid Tex-Mex restaurant with tiled, landscape-adorned tables and regional art. The specialties are fajitas, and the restaurant is open for lunch and dinner Mondays through Saturdays.

A unique dining experience can be had with **Cowboy Morning** (✆ **806/488-2100**). The meals include a horse-drawn wagon ride to a canyon overlook and authentic chuck wagon cuisine. Cowboy Morning includes biscuits, scrambled eggs, sausage, potato casserole, cowboy coffee, and orange juice and is priced at $23 for adults, $18 for children ages 4 to 12, and free for children 3 and under. The nighttime offering is Western Night

in Palo Duro Canyon, including a jeep tour, barbecue dinner, living history presentation, and stage show (pricing varies depending on group size; call for details).

## 3 LUBBOCK

122 miles S of Amarillo; 100 miles SE of Clovis, New Mexico

When Capt. Randolph Marcy, one of the first Anglo explorers to happen on to the site of modern-day Lubbock, arrived, he was something less than impressed. "It was the dreaded Llano Estacado," he wrote, "a land where no man, either savage or civilized, permanently abides; it spreads forth into a treeless, desolate waste of uninhabited solitude, which has always been and must continue, uninhabited forever."

Certainly, Marcy would be in for a shock if he were to see Lubbock today: a city of about 250,000 residents, the home of a major university in Texas Tech, and the economic and cultural center of the surrounding South Plains. Self-labeled as "the nursery" for Austin's music scene, its musical heritage is legendary: Buddy Holly still reigns as the local king, but Tanya Tucker, Mac Davis, Waylon Jennings, and Dixie Chick Natalie Maines have also called the city home.

Named after Col. Thomas Lubbock, a Confederate officer, Lubbock was established in 1890 and grew rapidly, its economy built on cotton and cattle and, later, oil and gas. The city has long been a regional hub—hence the nickname, "Hub City." Look at a map and the moniker's appropriateness becomes crystal clear: Lubbock is surrounded by dozens of small agricultural towns.

A bit rough around the edges, Lubbock is a fun stopover for a night because of its lively dining scene, college-town vibe, and happening nightlife with plenty of good music.

### ESSENTIALS

#### Getting There

**BY PLANE** **Lubbock Preston Smith International Airport,** 5401 N. Martin Luther King Blvd. (✆ **806/775-2044;** www.flylia.com), sees 70 arrivals and departures daily. Three airlines serve the airport: **American Eagle** (✆ **800/433-7300**), **Continental** (✆ **800/525-0280**), and **Southwest** (✆ **800/435-9792**).

All the major car-rental agencies, including **Avis** and **Hertz,** have desks at the airport. **Royal Coach Towne Car Service** (✆ **806/795-3888**) offers airport transportation in Lincoln Town Cars into the city for $14 to $24.

**BY CAR** Lubbock sits at the intersection of three major highways on the "Port to Plains" route; I-27 enters the city from the north and becomes U.S. 87 south of Lubbock. Cutting down from Clovis, New Mexico, northwest of the city, U.S. 84 continues southeast to I-20 near Abilene. U.S. 62/82 is the third major highway that runs through Lubbock, entering town from the southwest, where it is the primary route to and from Carlsbad and Roswell, New Mexico, and continuing through the plains to the east.

#### Getting Around

Getting around Lubbock is fairly stress free: It is laid out on a standard grid with few anomalies, with I-27 bisecting the city north-south and Loop 289, a major highway,

circling it. Downtown is located just west of I-27, accessible via either exit 3 (19th St.) or exit 4 (4th St.). The east-west streets in central Lubbock are numbered, beginning with 1st in the north, and the north-south streets surrounding I-27 are arranged alphabetically, from Avenue A on the east side of the highway and continuing to Avenue X on the west side of I-27.

**CitiBus** (✆ **806/712-2000;** www.citibus.com), Lubbock's mass transit system, operates 11 routes Monday through Friday from 5:45am to 7:15pm and Saturday from 7:15am to 7:35pm. No service is offered on Sunday. The main downtown transfer station is located at the intersection of Broadway and Buddy Holly Avenue (the equivalent of Ave. H). Fares are $1.50 for adults, $1 for children ages 6 to 12, 75¢ for seniors and those with disabilities, and free for children 5 and under. A $3 day pass allows for unlimited rides.

Taxi service is offered by **City Cab** (✆ **806/765-7474**) and **Yellow Cab** (✆ **806/765-7777**).

## Visitor Information

**Visit Lubbock, the Convention and Visitors Bureau,** 1500 Broadway, 6th floor (✆ **800/692-4035** or 806/747-5232; www.visitlubbock.com), can provide visitors with local maps and information on lodging, dining, and attractions.

**FAST FACTS** The **University Medical Center,** 602 Indiana Ave. (✆ **806/775-8200;** www.umchealthsystem.com), operates 24-hour emergency rooms. The main **post office** is located downtown at 411 Ave. L and is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm.

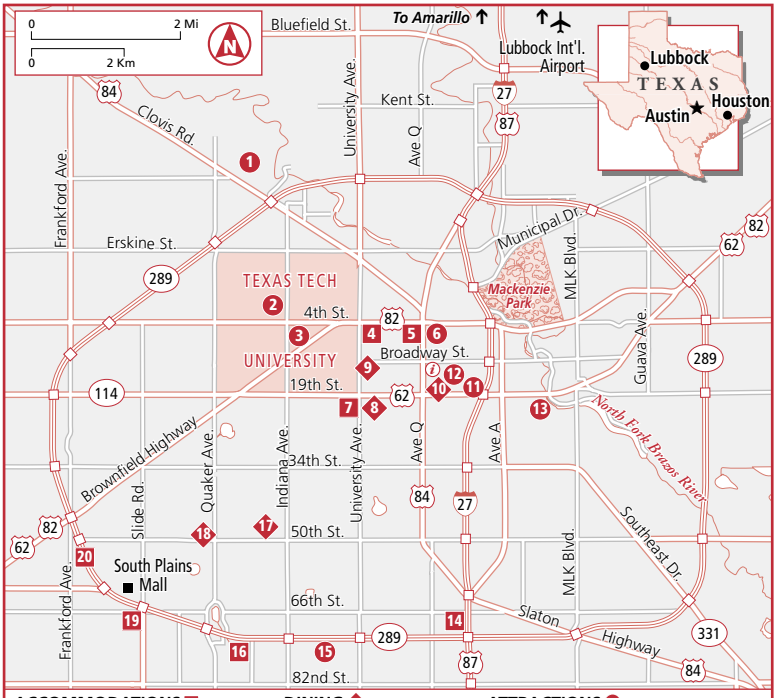


# WHAT TO SEE & DO

## The Top Attractions

**Buddy Holly Center ★★** Named for Lubbock's legendary rock pioneer, this gem of a museum is a must-visit if you're a rock-'n'-roll fan, and at least worth a quick look if you're not. The permanent exhibit about the life and music of Buddy Holly is the centerpiece of this facility, which also houses an art gallery and the Texas Musicians Hall of Fame. Though Holly died in a plane crash at the age of 23, his impact on the development of rock is undeniable—he influenced everyone from Elton John to the Grateful Dead. The center's collection includes such memorabilia as Holly's trademark horn-rimmed glasses (the pair recovered from the crash site) alongside his guitars, personal mementos, and interactive exhibits. Visitors should also view the 20-minute Holly documentary, if time allows. The Lubbock Fine Arts Gallery features rotating exhibits of all kinds, and the Texas Musicians Hall of Fame gives perspective on Lubbock's deep musical heritage. Acting as a regional arts center, the B.H.C. also hosts numerous courtyard concerts, classes, and "Cultural Conversations" on topics of regional artistic interest. The museum's breadth dictates that guests spend a bit more than an hour here. If you crave more Holly, ask for their handout with directions to his grave, birthplace, and other places of interest.

1801 Crickets Ave. in the Depot Entertainment District. ✆ **806/775-3560.** www.buddyhollycenter.org. $5 adults, $3 seniors, $2 children 7–17 and students, free for children 6 and under. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm. Closed Mon and major holidays.




**ACCOMMODATIONS** ■
Arbor Inn & Suites **20**
Courtyard by Marriott **16**
Embassy Suites **19**
Holiday Inn Hotel & Towers **5**
Motel 6 **14**
Overton Hotel & Conference Center **4**
Woodrow House **7**

**DINING** ◆
Café J **8**
Chez Suzette **18**
Gardski's Loft **9**
Texas Cafe and Bar **17**
Triple J Chophouse & Brew Co **10**

**ATTRACTIONS** ●
American Wind Power Center **13**
Buddy Holly Center **11**
Buddy Holly Statue and West Texas Walk of Fame **6**
La Diosa Cellars **12**
Lubbock Lake Landmark **1**
McPherson Cellars Winery **12**
Museum of Texas Tech University **2**
National Ranching Heritage Center **3**
Science Spectrum & OMNI Theater **15**

**Museum of Texas Tech University ★** Housing some thr ee million objects and artifacts, this museum is a w ell-rounded facility that co vers a div erse, if not terribly focused, mix of subjects: Visual arts, natural and social sciences, and the humanities ar e all represented with both permanent and r egularly rotating exhibits. The ethnology and textiles collection is among the best y ou'll find anywhere, composed of objects made b y people living in Texas, the Southwest, and the Great Plains. It also has galleries filled with Taos and sub-S aharan ar t, exhibits on wildlife, and full-siz e dinosaur skeletons. The temporary exhibits are routinely excellent. Also on-site is the Moody Planetarium (public

shows are held daily for $2 adults, $1 students and seniors, free for children 4 and under). Expect to spend between 1 and 2 hours here if you want to scratch the museum's surface.

3301 4th St. at Indiana Ave. ✆ **806/742-2490.** www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu. Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm (until 8:30pm Thurs); Sun 1–5pm. Closed Mon and major holidays.

**National Ranching Heritage Center** As some of the country's largest and most storied ranches originated in the Panhandle area in the early 1900s, Lubbock is a natural for the home of a museum dedicated to preserving the history of ranching in the United States. However, the history buff short on time might skip this in favor of the more comprehensive Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon (p. 430). The outdoor displays consist of nearly 40 relocated historic buildings; visitors can tour such structures as a vaquero corral (1783), a log cabin (1850), a "dugout" dwelling (1890), and the Victorian-style Barton House (1909). The center hosts several annual events, including a chuck wagon dinner and concert in the spring, fiddle dances in the summer, and "Candlelight at the Ranch" in December. Allow a half-hour to an hour.

3121 4th St. at Indiana Ave. ✆ **806/742-0498.** www.nrhc.com. Free admission. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm. Closed major holidays.



## More Attractions

**American Wind Power Center** Finds Between 1850 and 1920, more than 700 American companies manufactured windmills, but today a mere two U.S. businesses make these iconic machines. Such statistics provided an impetus for this unique and worthwhile museum, which displays a collection of 200 water-pumping windmills. Windmills of every size, shape, and color are displayed in the main gallery and outside on the museum's grounds, including a rare twin-wheel windmill, with a pair of 12-foot wheels on a single to wer, and a 164-foot Vestas wind turbine—with 77-foot blades. (It powers the museum as well as 60 homes.) Indoors, the center houses many more unusual windmills, an art gallery, and a gift shop. Allow 1 hour.

1701 Canyon Lake Dr. ✆ **806/747-8734.** www.windmill.com. $5 suggested donation per person, or $10 per family. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Closed major holidays. Located 1 mile west of I-27 via 19th St.

**Buddy Holly Statue and West Texas Walk of Fame** This shady urban isle just west of the Lubbock Civic Center pays tribute to Lubbock's most famous son, Buddy Holly, with an oversize statue of his likeness, guitar in hand. In 1979, Holly became the first inductee into the West Texas Walk of Fame that surrounds the statue. Other inductees include actor Barry Corbin *(WarGames)* and musicians Roy Orbison, Tanya Tucker, and Waylon Jennings. It's a pleasant spot to sit on a bench, enjoy the gardens, and reflect on the fleeting life and times of an American original.

Btw. 7th and 8th sts. at Ave. Q.

### Fun Fact

*"At least the first 40 songs we wrote were Buddy Holly–influenced."*
—Former Beatle Paul McCartney

**Lubbock Lake Landmark** A unit of the Museum of Texas Tech University, the Lubbock Lake Landmark consists of a 300-acre archaeological and natural history preserve, believed to be the only site in North America where a complete record of 12,000 years

## A Different Kind of Texas Tea

The images of herds of longhorn, oil pumps on the horizon, and endless cotton fields might be the enduring images of the northwestern Texas plains, but if the area's burgeoning wine industry has anything to do with it, the vineyard may just become another regional icon. The climate is close to ideal for the cultivation of grapes, with its moderate elevation, warm days, and cool nights. Within a 15-minute drive of Lubbock, there are five wineries that open their doors to tours.

Emerging from a grape-growing experiment on a shady Lubbock patio in 1976, **Llano Estacado Winery,** located 5 miles southeast of Lubbock on FM 1585 between U.S. 84 and U.S. 87 (✆ **806/745-2258;** www.llanowine.com), is now one of the largest and best wineries in Texas: Its wines have won more awards than any other winery in the state. The tasting room is open from 10am to 5pm Monday through Saturday and from noon to 5pm Sunday. **Cap*Rock Winery,** 5 miles south of Lubbock at U.S. 87 South and Woodrow Road (✆ **806/863-2704;** www.caprockwinery.com), uses vinifera grapes to produce chardonnays, cabernet sauvignons, and other wines. Free tours and samples are available from 10am to 5pm Monday through Saturday. **Pheasant Ridge Winery** on Route 3, 12 miles northeast of Lubbock via I-27 (✆ **806/746-6033;** www.pheasantridgewinery.com), is located on the site of one of Texas's oldest vineyards and offers tours and tastings Friday and Saturday from noon to 6pm and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. In the Depot Entertainment District, visit **La Diosa Cellars,** 901 17th St. (✆ **806/744-3600;** www.ladiosacellars.com). Its tasting room is actually a fantastic wine bar (serving tapas and featuring live acoustic music), open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Saturday. The winery sources its fruit from Texas and produces about 2,000 cases a year. **McPherson Cellars Winery,** 1615 Texas Ave. (✆ **806/687-9463;** www.mcphersoncellars.com), is the newest of the bunch, open from 10am to 5pm Monday through Friday and noon to 5pm Sunday.

of human history has been uncovered. The nicely presented interpretive center features chronological displays on each group that has inhabited the region, from the nomadic hunters of the Paleo-Indian period to the pioneers of the late 1800s. The facility requires about 45 minutes to tour, and, if it's fresh air you're after, take an extra hour to explore 4 miles of nature trails and an outdoor sculpture garden with life-size bronzes depicting animals that once roamed the area, including a mammoth and a giant armadillo. Additionally, Lubbock Lake Landmark is home to an active archaeological program during the summer and children's programs throughout the year.

2401 Landmark Lane at Loop 289 and Clovis Hwy. (U.S. 84). ✆ **806/742-1116.** www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu/LLL/index.html. Free admission (donation requested). Tues–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm.

**Science Spectrum & OMNI Theater** Kids This museum aims to educate children about science and technology, and hits the bull's-eye more often than not. With three

floors and 200 exhibits that take 1 to 2 hours to explore, the subject matter runs the gamut from animals and aquariums to space and flight, and many of the displays are interactive. Also of note is the "Brazos River Journey," a permanent aquarium/terrarium exhibit detailing how the regional river ecosystem interacts with the hand of man, complete with rattlesnakes, largemouth bass, and sharks. The facility is also home to the OMNI Theater—with a 55-foot dome screen—and a gift shop.

2579 S. Loop 289 (btw. Indiana and University aves.). ✆ **806/745-6299.** www.sciencespectrum.com. Admission $7.50 adults, $6 seniors and children 3–12, free for children 2 and under. Additional tickets ($6.50–$8) necessary for the OMNI Theater; combo passes available. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 10am–6pm; Sun 1–5pm.

## Outdoor Activities

Within the city limits of Lubbock, the 248-acre **Mackenzie Park,** located east of I-27 at 4th Street (✆ **806/775-2687**), is the largest recreation area, with two golf courses—one traditional and one Frisbee—walking, jogging, and equestrian trails, and Prairie Dog Town, one of the few active colonies in the urban United States.

**Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway** (✆ **806/455-1492;** www.tpwd.state.tx.us) is a 2 1/2-hour drive from Lubbock, located to the northeast near Quitaque off Tex. 86. Like Palo Duro Canyon to the northwest, this 15,313-acre park offers a startling contrast to the plains in its jagged formations of red rocks and diverse vegetation. An abandoned railroad line was converted into a 65-mile trail system that travels along a canyon floor, through a one-time railroad tunnel, and up a steep incline onto the mesa of the High Plains. Hikers, bikers, and horses are permitted on the trail. Several other hiking opportunities exist in the park as well. Primitive backcountry campsites are available for $8 nightly as well as tent sites for $12 and sites with partial RV hookups for $15 to $20. Additionally, boaters and fishers can take advantage of Lake Theo, located on the south side of the park. The park charges a $3 day-use fee per person (free for kids 12 and under).

**BOATING** Two boat ramps access the spring-fed **Buffalo Springs Lake,** Tex. 835, 5 miles east of Loop 289 ( ✆ **806/747-3353;** www.buffalospringslake.net). Gate fees are $5 adults, $3 children 10 and under, $1 seniors, and $5 per watercraft and $10 per ATV. Canoe and paddle-boat rentals are available. Boating is also allowed at **Lake Alan Henry** (✆ **806/775-2673;** www.lakealanhenry.org), 65 miles southeast of Lubbock via U.S. 84 and FM 2458, a rugged-looking reservoir surrounded by a wildlife habitat area with several miles of hiking trails. Day-use fees are $6 to $8 and boating fees are $5 to $8.

**GOLF** Lubbock has several public 18-hole golf courses, including **Elm Grove Golf Course,** 3202 Milwaukee Ave. (✆ **806/799-7801**), with greens fees of $25 to $30 with a cart or $10 to $20 on foot; **Shadow Hills Golf Course,** 6002 3rd St. (✆ **806/793-9700**), with greens fees of $27 to $34 with a cart and $12 to $21 without; **Rawls Golf Course,** 4th Street and Texas Tech Parkway on the campus of Texas Tech (✆ **806/742-4635**), with greens fees of $42 to $62 with cart; and **Meadowbrook Golf Course,** 601 Municipal Dr. in Mackenzie Park (✆ **806/765-6679**), with two 18-hole courses and greens fees of $17 to $29 with cart or $13 to $20 without. Nearby, the **Mackenzie Park Disk Golf Course** is free, although you'll need your own Frisbee. It is a 21-hole course that includes a 470-yard shot over the Brazos River from a cliff.

**HIKING** Four miles of nature trails snake around **Lubbock Lake Landmark** (p. 436), as well as the 65-mile trail way at **Caprock Canyons State Park.** Several miles of walking

and jogging trails, many of which are horse-friendly, are within the city limits at **Mackenzie Park,** 4th Street and I-27 (✆ **806/775-2687**).

**MOUNTAIN BIKING** There are a few trails at **Buffalo Springs Lake,** Tex. 835, 5 miles east of Loop 289 (see "Boating," above), but Lubbock's hard-core mountain bikers head north to **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** (see "Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park," earlier in this chapter) and **Caprock Canyons State Park.**

**SWIMMING** Lubbock is home to four municipal pools, all outdoor and open from late May to early August: **Clapp Municipal Swimming Pool,** 4500 Ave. U; **Mae Simmons Community Center ,** 2004 Oak St.; **Maxey Park,** 4007 30th St.; and **Rogers Park,** 3200 Bates St. In season, each is open from 1 to 6pm daily with an admission fee of $2 adults, $1.50 children 17 and under. For further information, call ✆ **806/775-2687. Buffalo Springs Lake** (see "Boating," above) boasts two beaches that are open to swimmers year-round. Aside from the admission fee ($5 adults, $3 children 11 and under, $1 seniors), there is no additional fee to swim. A year-round indoor pool is located at the **YWCA,** 3101 35th St. (✆ **806/792-2723**). Swimming costs $6 for adults, $3.50 for kids.

## Spectator Sports

The Lubbock home crowd roots for the **Texas Tech Red Raiders,** who compete in Big 12 football, baseball, and men's and women's basketball. Call ✆ **888/462-4412** or 806/742-4412 or visit http://texastech.cstv.com for schedules and ticket information.

## Shopping

Lubbock is home to the region's largest mall, **South Plains Mall,** 6002 Slide Rd. at South Loop 289 (✆ **806/792-4653;** www.southplainsmall.com), which houses more than 150 stores, including Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, and many other department stores, specialty shops, and restaurants. The mall's hours are from 10am to 9pm Monday through Saturday and from noon to 6pm Sunday. The **Antique Mall of Lubbock,** 7907 W. 19th St. ( ✆ **806/796-2166;** www.antqmall.com), offers West Texas's largest selection of antiques, open daily from 10am to 6pm.

# WHERE TO STAY

You'll find Lubbock's greatest concentration of hotels and motels in three areas: downtown; off of I-27 between 50th Street and Loop 289; and in the city's southwest corner, off Loop 289 near Quaker and Indiana avenues. Rates are highest the weekends Texas Tech plays home football games and during graduation and other special events.

Among the city's chain properties are **Courtyard by Marriott,** 4001 S. Loop 289 (✆ **806/795-1633**), with double rates of $119 to $169; **Embassy Suites,** 5215 S. Loop 289 ( ✆ **806/771-7000**), with suites for $109 to $299; and **Motel 6,** 909 66th St. (✆ **800/466-8356** or 806/745-5541), with double rates of $42 to $52. In Post, 36 miles southeast of Lubbock via U.S. 84, the historic 1915 **Hotel Garza,** 302 E. Main St. (✆ **806/495-3962;** www.hotelgarza.com), offers individually decorated rooms and suites for $96 to $142 for two people, as well as a number of guest cottages for $80 to $300 nightly. Under construction at press time and slated to open in fall 2009, Lubbock's biggest hotel will soon be the **Overton Hotel & Conference Center,** on 4th Street just east of University Avenue ( ✆ **806/776-7000;** www.overtonhotel.com), with double rates of $169 to $299.

Room taxes in Lubbock add 13% to lodging bills.

**Arbor Inn & Suites ★** Opening in 2005, this independent pr operty impressed me with its attention to detail and excellent service. The rooms are fresh and spacious, averaging about 500 square feet, and have great bathrooms, with granite counters and plenty of space. Functional and stylish, all rooms have a sleeper couch and many have balconies; the suites hav e complete kitchens as w ell. Ultimately, I was won o ver by the br eakfast, featuring do-it-y ourself waffle stations with pr emeasured batter and a Texas-shaped griddle, and the spectacular outdoor pool, with a faux beach, water fall, and fountains.

5310 Englewood Ave., Lubbock, TX 79424. ✆ **866/644-2319** or 806/722-2726. www.arborinnandsuites.com. 73 units, including 24 suites. $79–$99 double; $109 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; exercise room; indoor Jacuzzi; business c enter; complimentary laundry machines. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/DVD player, kitchen, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, iron, safe.

**Holiday Inn Hotel & Towers** The top do wntown hotel in L ubbock, this early 1980s–era Holiday Inn is the city's largest lodging option, located adjacent to the Civic Center smack-dab in the middle of do wntown. Well-maintained and comfor table, the rooms are pleasant if unremarkable, with off-white walls and beige furnishings. I like the east tower, six stories of r ooms surrounding a wide-open atrium. The suites with w est-facing windo ws ar e the best—guests ar e gr eeted ev ery morning b y the B uddy H olly statue on the West Texas Walk of F ame belo w. O ther r ooms o verlook a tr eed central courtyard.

801 Ave. Q, Lubbock, TX 79401. ✆ **800/HOLIDAY** (465-4329) or 806/763-1200. Fax 806/763-2656. www.holidayinn.com. 293 units, including 72 suites. $89–$99 double; $119–$139 suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small indoor pool; exercise room; indoor Jacuzzi; sauna; courtesy car; limited room service; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, complimentary Wi-Fi, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Woodrow House ★** The Southern Colonial ar chitecture (complete with white pillars and a redbrick exterior) of this urban bed-and-breakfast belies its age: Built in 1995, the Woodrow House combines Texas tradition with modern amenities. The suite here—a retrofit Santa Fe caboose in the backyar d—is a real eye-catcher, and my fav orite room in town. It has a queen-size bed framed by wrought iron and a foldout futon, as w ell as a kitchenette. The old engineers' seats are now great spots to sit and read. Inside, visitors enjoy an elegant parlor and sev en themed rooms. The Lone Star Room is a lot of fun: a framed Republic of Texas dollar, longhorn skulls, a Texas flag, and a king-size bed. But if your nostalgic leanings ar e a bit mor e modern, book the '50s R oom, where images of Buddy Holly and Elvis abound.

2629 19th St., L ubbock, TX 79410. ✆ **800/687-5236** or 806/793-3330. F ax 806/793-7676. w ww.woodrowhouse.com. 7 units. $95–$135 double; $115–$155 suit e. Rates include full br eakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, complimentary Wi-Fi, kitchenette (in suite), fridge, hair dryer, iron.

## Camping

**Buffalo Springs Lake,** FM 835 (✆ **806/747-3353**), has one of the most scenic campgrounds in the ar ea, with 33 shady sites and thr ee tent ar eas. Camping fees ar e $12 for tents and $18 to $24 for full hookups. **Caprock Canyons S tate Park** (✆ **806/455-1492**) is another popular camping destination, with primitive backcountry sites ($8) and tent sites ($12–$14), as well as sites with par tial RV hookups ($15–$20). S ee "Outdoor Activities," above, for complete information on both par ks.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Café J ★** MEDITERRANEAN/ECLECTIC Hip yet homey, Café J has drawn raves for taking a fresh direction in Lubbock's dining scene, with a menu that includes a number of pastas and crepes (including the scrumptious Santa Fe Crepe, stuffed with ground beef and green chiles, and topped with pepper jack cheese) and a nice selection of lighter fare, including salads and grilled ahi tuna. More substantial entrees include soy-and-sake-glazed orange roughy and pistachio-crusted pork tenderloin. Thanks in part to its location directly across from the Texas Tech campus, the pair of bars here are among Lubbock's trendiest nightspots.

2605 19th St. ✆ **806/743-5400.** www.cafejlubbock.com. Reservations accepted. Main courses $9–$26. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun and Tues–Fri 11am–2:30pm; Tues–Sat 5:30–11pm. Bars open later.

**Chez Suzette ★★** Finds FRENCH/ITALIAN Almost hidden in a strip mall, Chez Suzette is Lubbock's most romantic dining spot. Black-and-red checkerboard floors, lattice, and dim lighting give the dining room an intimate, distinctly French feel, which carries over to the menu. Start with escargot or carpaccio and a salad, then move on to the main course: coq au vin; veal medallions topped with blue cheese and garlic sauce, served with zucchini pancakes; or ahi tuna with a balsamic reduction. Lighter selections include pastas and vegetarian plates. Lunches are similar but smaller, and the mouthwatering desserts—crème brûlée, bananas Foster, crepes, and pastries—are all made from scratch.

4423 50th St., in the Quaker Square Shopping Center. ✆ **806/795-6796.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Mon–Sat 5:30pm until closing (9 or 10pm, depending on business).

**Gardski's Loft** AMERICAN A favorite of both students and suits, this landmark eatery near the campus of Texas Tech University is actually a converted Victorian home, abandoned by its residents after a close call with a tornado in 1970.The place serves some mighty mean sandwiches—I can't resist the Smokin' Mad Jack, plump with smoked ham, brown sugar bacon, pepper jack, and red onions, with jalapeños on the side. A more upscale menu of lighter chicken and seafood plates is served at dinner; down-home favorites such as meatloaf, catfish, chicken-fried steak, and good burgers round out the menu.

2009 Broadway. ✆ **806/744-2391.** www.gardskisloft.com. Reservations accepted for large parties only. Main courses $6–$17. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

**Texas Cafe and Bar** BARBECUE This rowdy, smoky roadhouse, affectionately called "The Spoon" by locals, is pure Texas, from the local color seated at the bar and weathered tables to the Lone Star neon signs, longhorn skulls, and politically incorrect wooden Indian. The menu, too, is 100% Texan: nachos; barbecued turkey, beef, and sausage; Texas beans; and big, juicy burgers. Everything here is spicy, hearty, and just plain good. There's a poolroom in the back, and live music on weekends.

3604 50th St. ✆ **806/792-8544.** www.texascafeandbar.net. Reservations not accepted. Main courses $6–$9. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Bar open later.

**Triple J Chophouse & Brew Co. ★** STEAKS In the former domain of the Hub City Brewery, this eatery and microbrewery is more upscale than its predecessor, but still ranks near the top of my Lubbock list. There are tables in a long seating area, below brick

walls adorned with horns and Texas photography of all kinds, and a slick bar, which sits directly in front of the glass-enclosed brewing area. The menu focuses on beef, but also offers seafood, wood-fired pizzas, and some good ol' Texan comfort food (potpies, rib tips, chicken-fried steak). The sides are creative (like Parmesan creamed spinach, sweet potato custard, and shoestring fries), but the terrific brews remain a key attraction: There are typically 8 to 10 of them on tap, including excellent German Kölsch-style beer. If you're feeling extracarnivorous, you can "grab the bull by the horns" and order a hand-cut steak to the thickness you indicate tableside.

1807 Buddy Holly Ave., in the Depot District. ✆ **806/771-6555.** www.triplejchophouseandbrewco.com. Main courses $8–$25. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight.



## LUBBOCK AFTER DARK

### The Performing Arts

Built in 1938, the beautifully restored **Cactus Theater,** 1812 Buddy Holly Ave. (✆ **806/762-3233** for information; www.cactustheater.com), is now the centerpiece of Lubbock's performing arts scene. On Friday through Sunday, it features regular doo-wop and nostalgia shows, as well as other concerts and musicals. Popular productions include tributes to Buddy Holly and other music legends. Tickets run $15 to $40.

**Lubbock Symphony Orchestra,** 1313 Broadway, Ste. 2 (✆ **806/762-1688;** www.lubbocksymphony.org), performs 10 classical concerts and one pops concert every year at the Lubbock Civic Center Theater (at 6th St. and Ave. O), often featuring guest conductors and musicians from around the world. Ticket prices range from $10 to $50.

Established in 1926, the **Texas Tech University Theatre,** on the Texas Tech campus on 18th Street between Boston and Flint avenues (✆ **806/742-3603;** www.depts.ttu.edu/theatreanddance), has produced more than 1,000 plays in the time since. Recent productions include *The Full Monty, Death of a Salesman,* and *A Streetcar Named Desire.* The theater also hosts ballets, experimental plays, and one-act play festivals. Tickets are $12.

### Nightclubs & Bars

Lubbock has a bustling nightlife, primarily due to the presence of 25,000 Texas Tech students. The vibrant **Depot Entertainment District,** located between Texas Avenue and I-27 around 19th Street, is where you'll find the highest concentration of clubs, including **The Blue Light,** 1806 Buddy Holly Ave. (✆ **806/762-1185**), known for its live music and hip, young crowd. Also in the neighborhood, you can line dance and two-step to live country music at **Wild West,** 2216 I-27 (✆ **806/741-3031**). **Cricket's Grill and Draft House,** 2412 Broadway (✆ **806/744-4677**), is a rowdy Texas Tech hangout with nearly 100 beers on draft.

Many restaurants morph into bustling nightspots after sundown, including the **Texas Cafe and Bar** (p. 441) and **Café J** (p. 441). Just north of the Texas Tech campus, **Conference Cafe,** 3216 4th St. (✆ **806/747-7766**), is a rowdy college hangout. If you do imbibe in Lubbock, try the city's signature cocktail, the Chilton. Invented by a local doctor of the same name, the drink consists of vodka, fresh-squeezed lemon juice, and soda, in a salt-rimmed glass—the result is tart but refreshing.

# Appendix: Fast Facts, Toll-Free Numbers & Websites

## 1 FAST FACTS: TEXAS

**AMERICAN EXPRESS** There are branches throughout Texas; see "Fast Facts" in individual chapters for locations. To report a lost card, call ✆ **800/528-4800.** To report lost traveler's checks, call ✆ **800/221-7282.**

**AREA CODES** Area codes for Dallas are 214 and 972; Fort Worth, 817; Houston, 713 and 281; San Antonio, 210; and Austin, 512.

**ATM NETWORKS & CASHPOINTS** See "Money & Costs," p. 46.

**AUTOMOBILE ORGANIZATIONS** Auto clubs will supply maps, suggested routes, guidebooks, accident and bail bond insurance, and emergency road service. The **American Automobile Association (AAA)** is the major auto club in the United States. If you belong to an auto club in your home country, inquire about AAA reciprocity before you leave. You may be able to join AAA even if you're not a member of a reciprocal club; to inquire, call AAA (✆ **800/222-4357**). AAA is actually an organization of regional auto clubs, so look under "AAA Automobile Club" in the White Pages of the telephone directory. AAA has a nationwide emergency road service telephone number (✆ **800/AAA-HELP** [222-4357]).

**BUSINESS HOURS** Offices are usually open weekdays from 9am to 5pm. Banks are open weekdays from 9am to 3pm or later and sometimes Saturday mornings. Stores typically open between 9 and 10am and close between 5 and 6pm Monday through Saturday. Stores in shopping complexes or malls tend to stay open late, until about 9pm on weekdays and weekends, and many malls and larger department stores are open on Sundays. A growing number of discount stores (such as Wal-Mart) and grocery stores are open 24 hours a day.

**CAR RENTALS** See "Getting There & Getting Around," p. 42.

**DRINKING LAWS** The legal drinking age is 21, although minors can legally drink as long as they are within sight of their 21-or-older parents, guardians, or spouses. Where you can or cannot buy a drink, and what kind of drink, is determined in Texas by local option election, so the state is essentially a patchwork of regulations. In most parts of the state you can buy liquor, beer, and wine by the drink. However, there are a few areas where you can buy only beer (which Texas defines as having no more than 4% alcohol; anything higher is "ale"), and others where you can purchase beer or wine by the glass but not liquor. There are also some areas that are completely dry—mostly in the Panhandle Plains and near the state's eastern border—and other confusing areas

where one county will be dry (meaning you have to join private clubs—membership is normally free and immediately granted—to drink in restaurants, and liquor stores will stock beer and wine only) and the county right next to it will be wet.

**DRIVING RULES** See "Getting There & Getting Around," p. 42.

**ELECTRICITY** Like Canada, the United States uses 110–120 volts AC (60 cycles), compared to 220–240 volts AC (50 cycles) in most of Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. If your small appliances use 220–240 volts, you'll need a 110-volt transformer and a plug adapter with two flat parallel pins to operate them here. Downward converters that change 220–240 volts into 110–120 volts are difficult to find in the United States, so bring one with you. Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable—or find out whether your hotel supplies them to guests.

**EMBASSIES & CONSULATES** All embassies are located in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. Some consulates are located in major U.S. cities, and most nations have a mission to the United Nations in New York City. If your country isn't listed below, call for directory information in Washington, D.C. (✆ **202/555-1212**) or check **www.embassy.org/embassies**.

The embassy of **Australia** is at 1601 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036 (✆ **202/797-3000;** www.austemb.org). There are consulates in New York, Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

The embassy of **Canada** is at 501 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001 (✆ **202/682-1740;** www.canadianembassy.org). Other Canadian consulates are in Buffalo (New York), Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, and Seattle.

The embassy of **Ireland** is at 2234 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (✆ **202/462-3939;** www.irelandemb.org). Irish consulates are in Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and other cities. See website for complete listing.

The embassy of **New Zealand** is at 37 Observatory Circle NW, Washington, DC 20008 (✆ **202/328-4800;** www.nzembassy.com). New Zealand consulates are in Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, and Seattle.

The embassy of the **United Kingdom** is at 3100 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (✆ **202/588-7800;** www.britainusa.com). Other British consulates are in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle.

**EMERGENCIES** Call ✆ **911** to report a fire, call the police, or get an ambulance anywhere in the United States. This is a toll-free call. (No coins are required at public telephones.) If you encounter serious problems, contact the **Traveler's Aid Society International** (✆ **202/546-1127;** www.travelersaid.org). The Texas office is at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (✆ **972/574-4420**). This nationwide, nonprofit, social-service organization geared to helping travelers in difficult straits offers services that might include reuniting families separated while traveling, providing food and/or shelter to people stranded without cash, or even emotional counseling. If you're in trouble, seek them out.

**GASOLINE (PETROL)** At press time, in the U.S., the cost of gasoline (also known as gas, but never petrol) is high. Texas often has some of the lowest gasoline prices in the United States; although prices fluctuate (and will surely rise sharply

again), at press time regular unleaded gas ranged from $1.70 to $2.49 per gallon, with the lowest prices in the Gulf Coast area (for current prices, check out www.texasgasprices.com). Taxes are already included in the printed price. One U.S. gallon equals 3.8 liters or .85 imperial gallons.

**HOLIDAYS** Banks, government offices, post offices, and many stores, restaurants, and museums are closed on the following legal national holidays: January 1 (New Year's Day), the third Monday in January (Martin Luther King Day), the third Monday in February (Presidents' Day, Washington's Birthday), the last Monday in May (Memorial Day), July 4 (Independence Day), the first Monday in September (Labor Day), the second Monday in October (Columbus Day), November 11 (Veterans Day/Armistice Day), the fourth Thursday in November (Thanksgiving Day), and December 25 (Christmas). Also, the Tuesday following the first Monday in November is Election Day and is a federal government holiday in presidential-election years (held every 4 years, and next in 2012). Also, see "Texas Calendar of Events," in chapter 3.

**INSURANCE** **Medical Insurance** Although it's not required of travelers, health insurance is highly recommended. Most health insurance policies cover you if you get sick away from home—but check your coverage before you leave.

International visitors to the U.S. should note that unlike many European countries, the United States does not usually offer free or low-cost medical care to its citizens or visitors. Doctors and hospitals are expensive, and in most cases will require advance payment or proof of coverage before they render their services. Good policies will cover the costs of an accident, repatriation, or death. Packages such as **Europ Assistance's "Worldwide Healthcare Plan"** are sold by European automobile clubs and travel agencies at attractive rates. **Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc.** (✆ **800/777-8710;** www.worldwideassistance.com) is the agent for Europ Assistance in the United States. Though lack of health insurance may prevent you from being admitted to a hospital in nonemergencies, don't worry about being left on a street corner to die: The American way is to fix you now and bill the daylights out of you later.

If you're ever hospitalized more than 150 miles from home, **MedjetAssist** (✆ **800/527-7478;** www.medjetassistance.com) will pick you up and fly you to the hospital of your choice in a medically equipped and staffed aircraft 24 hours day, 7 days a week. Annual memberships are $225 individual, $350 family; you can also purchase short-term memberships.

**Canadians** should check with their provincial health plan offices or call **Health Canada** (✆ **866/225-0709;** www.hc-sc.gc.ca) to find out the extent of their coverage and what documentation and receipts they must take home in case they are treated in the United States.

Travelers from the U.K. should carry their European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which replaced the E111 form as proof of entitlement to free/reduced-cost medical treatment abroad (✆ **0845 606 2030;** www.ehic.org.uk). Note, however, that the EHIC covers only "necessary medical treatment," and for repatriation costs, lost money, baggage, or cancellation, travel insurance from a reputable company should always be sought (www.travelinsuranceweb.com).

As a safety net, you may want to buy travel medical insurance, particularly if you're traveling to a remote or high-risk area where emergency evacuation might be necessary. If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX Assistance** (✆ 410/453-6300; www.medexassist.com) or **Travel Assistance International** (✆ **800/821-2828;** www.travelassistance.com; for

general information on services, call the company's **Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc.,** at ✆ **800/777-8710**).

**Travel Insurance** The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the destination, the cost and length of your trip, your age and health, and the type of trip you're taking, but expect to pay between 5% and 8% of the vacation itself. You can get estimates from various providers through **InsureMyTrip.com.** Enter your trip cost and dates, your age, and other information, for prices from more than a dozen companies.

U.K. citizens and their families who make more than one trip abroad per year may find an annual travel insurance policy works out cheaper. Check **www.moneysupermarket.com**, which compares prices across a wide range of providers for single- and multitrip policies.

Most big travel agents offer their own insurance and will probably try to sell you their package when you book a holiday. Think before you sign. Britain's **Consumers' Association** recommends that you insist on seeing the policy and reading the fine print before buying travel insurance. The **Association of British Insurers** (✆ **020/7600-3333;** www.abi.org.uk) gives advice by phone and publishes *Holiday Insurance,* a free guide to policy provisions and prices. You might also shop around for better deals: Try **Columbus Direct** (✆ **0870/033-9988;** www.columbusdirect.net).

**Trip-Cancellation Insurance** Trip-cancellation insurance will help retrieve your money if you have to back out of a trip or depart early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Trip cancellation traditionally covers such events as sickness, natural disasters, and State Department advisories. The latest news in trip-cancellation insurance is the availability of **expanded hurricane coverage** and the **"any-reason"** cancellation coverage—which costs more but covers cancellations made for any reason. You won't get back 100% of your prepaid trip cost, but you'll be refunded a substantial portion. **TravelSafe** (✆ **888/885-7233;** www.travelsafe.com) offers both types of coverage. Expedia also offers any-reason cancellation coverage for its air-hotel packages. For details, contact one of the following recommended insurers: **Access America** (✆ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (✆ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (✆ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); and **Travelex Insurance Services** (✆ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com).

**INTERNET ACCESS** You'll have trouble finding convenient Internet access in the smaller towns, where you might have the best luck at the local library. Before you go, check for an Internet cafe in your destination at **www.cybercafes.com**.

**LEGAL AID** If you are "pulled over" for a minor infraction (such as speeding), never attempt to pay the fine directly to a police officer; this could be construed as attempted bribery, a much more serious crime. Pay fines by mail, or directly into the hands of the clerk of the court. If accused of a more serious offense, say and do nothing before consulting a lawyer. Here the burden is on the state to prove a person's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and everyone has the right to remain silent, whether he or she is suspected of a crime or actually arrested. Once arrested, a person can make one telephone call to a party of his or her choice. Call your embassy or consulate.

**LOST & FOUND** Be sure to contact all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card

companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. Visa's U.S. emergency number is ✆ **800/847-2911** or 410/581-9994. American Express cardholders and traveler's check holders should call ✆ **800/221-7282.** MasterCard holders should call ✆ **800/622-7747.** For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ✆ **800/555-1212.** If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via **Western Union** (✆ **800/325-6000;** www.westernunion.com).

**MAIL** At press time, domestic postage rates were 28¢ for a postcard and 44¢ for a letter. For international mail, a first-class letter of up to 1 ounce costs 98¢ (75¢ to Canada and 79¢ to Mexico); a first-class postcard costs the same as a letter. For more information go to **www.usps.com** and click on "Calculate Postage."

If you aren't sure what your address will be in the United States, mail can be sent to you, in your name, c/o General Delivery at the main post office of the city or region where you expect to be. (Call ✆ **800/275-8777** for information on the nearest post office.) The addressee must pick up mail in person and must produce proof of identity (driver's license, passport, and so on). Most post offices will hold your mail for up to 1 month, and are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, and Saturday from 9am to 3pm.

Always include zip codes when mailing items in the U.S. If you don't know your zip code, visit www.usps.com/zip4.

**MEDICAL CONDITIONS** If you have a medical condition that requires **syringe-administered medications,** carry a valid signed prescription from your physician; syringes in carry-on baggage will be inspected. Insulin in any form should have the proper pharmaceutical documentation. If you have a disease that requires treatment with **narcotics,** you should also carry documented proof with you—smuggling narcotics aboard a plane carries severe penalties in the U.S.

For **HIV-positive visitors,** requirements for entering the United States are somewhat vague and change frequently. For up-to-the-minute information, contact **AIDSinfo** (✆ **800/448-0440** or 301/519-6616 outside the U.S.; www.aidsinfo.nih.gov) or the **Gay Men's Health Crisis** (✆ **212/367-1000;** www.gmhc.org).

**NEWSPAPERS & MAGAZINES** The state's largest daily newspapers include the *Dallas Morning News, Houston Chronicle, Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* and *San Antonio Express-News.* Other cities and large towns, especially regional hubs, have daily newspapers, and many smaller towns publish weeklies. Free arts-heavy weeklies include the *Dallas Observer* and the *Austin Chronicle.* National newspapers such as *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal* can be purchased at newsstands in cities and major hotels; and you can also purchase two good monthly magazines, *Texas Highways* and *Texas Monthly,* throughout the state.

**PASSPORTS** The websites listed provide downloadable passport applications as well as the current fees for processing applications. For an up-to-date, country-by-country listing of passport requirements around the world, go to the "International Travel" tab of the U.S. State Department website at **http://travel.state.gov**. International visitors to the U.S. can obtain a visa application at the same website. ***Note:*** Children are required to present a passport when entering the United States at airports. More information on obtaining a passport for a minor can be found at http://travel.state.gov. Allow

plenty of time before your trip to apply for a passport; processing normally takes 4–6 weeks (3 weeks for expedited service) but can take longer during busy periods (especially spring). And keep in mind that if you need a passport in a hurry, you'll pay a higher processing fee.

**For Residents of Australia** You can pick up an application from your local post office or any branch of Passports Australia, but you must schedule an interview at the passport office to present your application materials. Call the **Australian Passport Information Service** at ✆ **131-232,** or visit the government website at www.passports.gov.au.

**For Residents of Canada** Passport applications are available at travel agencies throughout Canada or from the central **Passport Office,** Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (✆ **800/567-6868;** www.ppt.gc.ca). ***Note:*** Canadian children who travel must have their own passport. However, if you hold a valid Canadian passport issued before December 11, 2001, that bears the name of your child, the passport remains valid for you and your child until it expires.

**For Residents of Ireland** You can apply for a 10-year passport at the **Passport Office,** Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (✆ **01/671-1633;** www.irlgov.ie/iveagh). Those age 17 and under and 66 and over must apply for a 3-year passport. You can also apply at 1A South Mall, Cork (✆ **21/494-4700**), or at most main post offices.

**For Residents of New Zealand** You can pick up a passport application at any New Zealand Passports Office or download it from their website. Contact the **Passports Office** at ✆ **0800/225-050** in New Zealand or 04/474-8100, or log on to www.passports.govt.nz.

**For Residents of the United Kingdom** To pick up an application for a standard 10-year passport (5-year passport for children 15 and under), visit your nearest passport office, major post office, or travel agency, or contact the **United Kingdom Passport Service** at ✆ **0870/521-0410** or search its website at www.ukpa.gov.uk.

**POLICE** Dial ✆ **911** for a police or medical emergency.

**SMOKING** There is no statewide public smoking ban in Texas (a ban was proposed but significantly weakened in 2007); at least 20 individual cities have banned smoking in restaurants and/or bars and clubs and government buildings. Of major cities, San Antonio, Austin, and Houston have perhaps the strongest antismoking ordinances, with banning of smoking ranging from all public places (with exceptions for enclosed bar and outdoor seating areas designated as "smoking") to restaurants, bars, and restaurant bar areas.

**TAXES** The United States has no value-added tax (VAT) or other indirect tax at the national level. Every state, county, and city may levy its own local tax on all purchases, including hotel and restaurant checks and airline tickets. These taxes will not appear on price tags. Texans like to brag that the state is a great place to live because there is no state income tax. However, money for government services has to come from somewhere, and one of those sources is you, the traveler. Texas lodging taxes are among the highest in the region, ranging from the basic hotel rate of 6% to 17%, with the steepest rate in Houston. Sales taxes in Texas vary by county, but usually total from the basic state sales tax of 6.25% to 8.25%, slightly higher than in most surrounding states.

**TELEGRAPH, TELEX & FAX** **Telegraph and telex services** are provided primarily by **Western Union** (✆ **800/325-6000;** www.westernunion.com). You can telegraph (wire) money, or have it telegraphed to you, very quickly over the Western Union system, but this service

can cost as much as 15% to 20% of the amount sent. Most hotels have **fax machines** available for guest use (be sure to ask about the charge to use it). Many hotel rooms are wired for guests' fax machines. A less expensive way to send and receive faxes may be at stores such as the **UPS Store.**

**TELEPHONES** See "Staying Connected," p. 60.

**TIME** Almost all of Texas is in the Central Standard Time zone (CST); the only exception is the state's far-western tip, which observes Mountain Standard Time (MST). The continental United States is divided into **four time zones:** Eastern Standard Time (EST); Central Standard Time (CST), which includes all of Texas except its far-western tip; Mountain Standard Time (MST); and Pacific Standard Time (PST). Alaska and Hawaii have their own zones. For example, noon in New York City (EST) is 11am in Dallas (CST), 10am in Denver (MST), 9am in Los Angeles (PST), 8am in Anchorage (AST), and 7am in Honolulu (HST).

**Daylight saving time** is in effect from 1am on the second Sunday in March to 1am on the first Sunday in November, except in Arizona, Hawaii, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Daylight saving time moves the clock 1 hour ahead of standard time.

**TIPPING** Tips are a very important part of certain workers' income, and gratuities are the standard way of showing appreciation for services provided. (Tipping is certainly not compulsory if the service is poor!) In hotels, tip **bellhops** at least $1 per bag ($2–$3 if you have a lot of luggage) and tip the **chamber staff** $1 to $2 per day (more if you've left a disaster area for him or her to clean up). Tip the **doorman** or **concierge** only if he or she has provided you with some specific service (for example, calling a cab for you or obtaining difficult-to-get theater tickets). Tip the **valet-parking attendant** $1 every time you get your car.

In restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, tip **service staff** 15% to 20% of the check, tip **bartenders** 10% to 15%, tip **checkroom attendants** $1 per garment, and tip **valet-parking attendants** $1 per vehicle.

As for other service personnel, tip **cabdrivers** 15% of the fare; tip **skycaps** at airports at least $1 per bag ($2–$3 if you have a lot of luggage); and tip **hairdressers** and **barbers** 15% to 20%.

**TOILETS** You won't find public toilets or "restrooms" on the streets in most U.S. cities, but they can be found in hotel lobbies, bars, restaurants, museums, department stores, railway and bus stations, and service stations. Large hotels and fast-food restaurants are probably the best bet for good, clean facilities. If possible, avoid the toilets at parks and beaches, which tend to be dirty; some may be unsafe. Restaurants and bars in resorts or heavily visited areas may reserve their restrooms for patrons.

**USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS**

- Texas Parks & Wildlife Park Information ✆ **800/792-1112**
- Hunting information ✆ **512/389-4505**
- Fishing information ✆ **512/389-4505**
- Poison Center ✆ **800/POISON-1** (764-7661)
- Road conditions hot line ✆ **800/452-9292**
- Weather hot line ✆ **512/232-4265**
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control international traveler's hot line ✆ **404/332-4559**

**VISAS** For information about U.S. visas go to **http://travel.state.gov** and click on "Visas."

**Australian** citizens can obtain up-to-date visa information from the **U.S. Embassy Canberra,** Moonah Place, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (✆ **02/6214-5600**), or by checking the U.S. Diplomatic

Mission's website at **http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/consular**.

**British** subjects can obtain up-to-date visa information by calling the **U.S. Embassy Visa Information Line** (✆ **0891/200-290**) or by visiting the "Visas to the U.S." section of the American Embassy London's website at **www.usembassy.org.uk**.

**Irish** citizens can obtain up-to-date visa information through the **Embassy of the USA Dublin,** 42 Elgin Rd., Dublin 4, Ireland (✆ **353/1-668-8777**), or by checking the "Consular Services" section of the website at **http://dublin.usembassy.gov**.

Citizens of **New Zealand** can obtain up-to-date visa information by contacting the **U.S. Embassy New Zealand,** 29 Fitzherbert Terrace, Thorndon, Wellington (✆ **644/472-2068**), or get the information directly from the "For New Zealanders" section of the website at **http://newzealand.usembassy.gov**.

# 2 TOLL-FREE NUMBERS & WEBSITES

## MAJOR U.S. AIRLINES

(*flies internationally as well)

**AirTran Airways**
✆ 800/247-8726
www.airtran.com

**American Airlines***
✆ 800/433-7300 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 020/7365-0777 (in U.K.)
www.aa.com

**Continental Airlines***
✆ 800/523-3273 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 084/5607-6760 (in U.K.)
www.continental.com

**Delta Air Lines***
✆ 800/221-1212 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 084/5600-0950 (in U.K.)
www.delta.com

**Frontier Airlines**
✆ 800/432-1359
www.frontierairlines.com

**JetBlue Airways**
✆ 800/538-2583 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 080/1365-2525 (in U.K.)
www.jetblue.com

**Midwest Airlines**
✆ 800/452-2022
www.midwestairlines.com

**Northwest Airlines**
✆ 800/225-2525 (in U.S.)
✆ 870/0507-4074 (in U.K.)
www.nwa.com

**United Airlines***
✆ 800/864-8331 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 084/5844-4777 in U.K.
www.united.com

**US Airways***
✆ 800/428-4322 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 084/5600-3300 (in U.K.)
www.usairways.com

## MAJOR INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES

**Aeroméxico**
✆ 800/237-6639 (in U.S.)
✆ 020/7801-6234 (in U.K., information only)
www.aeromexico.com

**Air Canada**
✆ 888/247-2262 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 087/1220-1111 (in U.K.)
www.aircanada.com

**Air India**
✆ 212/407-1371 (in U.S.)
✆ 91 22 2279 6666 (in India)
✆ 020/8745-1000 (in U.K.)
www.airindia.com

**Air New Zealand**
✆ 800/262-1234 (in U.S.)
✆ 800/663-5494 (in Canada)
✆ 0800/028-4149 (in U.K.)
www.airnewzealand.com

**British Airways**
✆ 800/247-9297 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 087/0850-9850 (in U.K.)
www.british-airways.com

**Emirates Airlines**
✆ 800/777-3999 (in U.S.)
✆ 087/0243-2222 (in U.K.)
www.emirates.com

**Qantas Airways**
✆ 800/227-4500 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 084/5774-7767 (in U.K.)
✆ 13 13 13 (in Australia)
www.qantas.com

**South African Airways**
✆ 271/1978-5313 (international)
✆ 0861 FLYSAA (0861-359722) (in South Africa)
www.flysaa.com

**Virgin Atlantic Airways**
✆ 800/821-5438 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 087/0574-7747 (in U.K.)
www.virgin-atlantic.com

**WestJet**
✆ 800/538-5696 (in U.S. and Canada)
www.westjet.com

## CAR-RENTAL AGENCIES

**Advantage**
✆ 800/777-5500 (in U.S.)
✆ 021/0344-4712 (outside of U.S.)
www.advantage.com

**Alamo**
✆ 800/GO-ALAMO (462-5266)
www.alamo.com

**Avis**
✆ 800/331-1212 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 084/4581-8181 (in U.K.)
www.avis.com

**Budget**
✆ 800/527-0700 (in U.S.)
✆ 087/0156-5656 (in U.K.)
✆ 800/268-8900 (in Canada)
www.budget.com

**Dollar**
✆ 800/800-4000 (in U.S.)
✆ 800/848-8268 (in Canada)
✆ 080/8234-7524 (in U.K.)
www.dollar.com

**Enterprise**
✆ 800/261-7331 (in U.S.)
✆ 514/355-4028 (in Canada)
✆ 012/9360-9090 (in U.K.)
www.enterprise.com

**Hertz**
✆ 800/645-3131
www.hertz.com

**National**
✆ 800/CAR-RENT (227-7368)
www.nationalcar.com

**Payless**
✆ 800/PAYLESS (729-5377)
www.paylesscarrental.com

**Rent-A-Wreck**
✆ 800/535-1391
www.rentawreck.com

**Thrifty**
✆ 800/367-2277
✆ 918/669-2168 (outside of U.S.)
www.thrifty.com

## MAJOR HOTEL & MOTEL CHAINS

**Best Western International**
✆ 800/780-7234 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/393-130 (in U.K.)
www.bestwestern.com

**Clarion Hotels**
✆ 800/CL ARION (252-7466) or 877/424-6423 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/444-444 (in U.K.)
www.choicehotels.com

**Comfort Inns**
✆ 800/228-5150
✆ 0800/444-444 (in U.K.)
www.comfortinn.com

**Courtyard by Marriott**
✆ 888/236-2427 (in U.S.)
✆ 0800/221-222 (in U.K.)
www.marriott.com/courtyard

**Crowne Plaza Hotels**
✆ 888/303-1746
www.ichotelsgroup.com/crowneplaza

**Days Inn**
✆ 800/329-7466 (in U.S.)
✆ 0800/280-400 (in U.K.)
www.daysinn.com

**Doubletree Hotels**
✆ 800/222-TREE (222-8733) (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 087/0590-9090 (in U.K.)
www.doubletree.com

**Econo Lodges**
✆ 800/55-ECONO (800/553-2666)
www.choicehotels.com

**Embassy Suites**
✆ 800/EMBASSY (362-2779)
www.embassysuites.com

**Fairfield Inn by Marriott**
✆ 800/228-2800 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/221-222 (in U.K.)
www.marriott.com/fairfieldinn

**Four Seasons**
✆ 800/819-5053 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/6488-6488 (in U.K.)
www.fourseasons.com

**Hampton Inn**
✆ 800/HAMPTON (800/426-7866)
www.hamptoninn.com

**Hilton Hotels**
✆ 800/HILTONS (445-8667) (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 087/0590-9090 (in U.K.)
www.hilton.com

**Holiday Inn**
✆ 800/315-2621 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/405-060 (in U.K.)
www.holidayinn.com

**Howard Johnson**
✆ 800/446-4656 (in U.S. and Canada)
www.hojo.com

**Hyatt**
✆ 888/591-1234 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 084/5888-1234 (in U.K.)
www.hyatt.com

**InterContinental Hotels & Resorts**
✆ 800/424-6835 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/1800-1800 (in U.K.)
www.ichotelsgroup.com

**La Quinta Inns and Suites**
✆ 800/642-4271 (in U.S. and Canada)
www.lq.com

**Marriott**
✆ 877/236-2427 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/221-222 (in U.K.)
www.marriott.com

**Motel 6**
✆ 800/4MOTEL6 (466-8356)
www.motel6.com

**Omni Hotels**
✆ 888/444-OMNI (444-6664)
www.omnihotels.com

**Quality**
✆ 877/424-6423 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/444-444 (in U.K.)
www.qualityinn.com

**Radisson Hotels & Resorts**
✆ 888/201-1718 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/374-411 (in U.K.)
www.radisson.com

**Ramada Worldwide**
✆ 888/2-RAMADA (272-6232) (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 080/8100-0783 (in U.K.)
www.ramada.com

**Red Carpet Inns**
✆ 800/251-1962
www.bookroomsnow.com

**Red Roof Inns**
✆ 866/686-4335 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 614/601-4075 (international)
www.redroof.com

**Renaissance Hotels & Resorts**
✆ 800/468-3571 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/221-222 (in U.K.)
www.marriott.com

**Residence Inn by Marriott**
✆ 800/331-3131 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 800/221-222 (in U.K.)
www.marriott.com/residenceinn

**Rodeway Inns**
✆ 877/424-6423
www.rodewayinn.com

**Sheraton Hotels & Resorts**
✆ 800/325-3535 (in U.S.)
✆ 800/543-4300 (in Canada)
✆ 0800/3253-5353 (in U.K.)
www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton

**Super 8 Motels**
✆ 800/800-8000
www.super8.com

**Travelodge**
✆ 800/578-7878
www.travelodge.com

**Westin Hotels & Resorts**
✆ 800/937-8461 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 0800/3259-5959 (in U.K.)
www.starwoodhotels.com/westin

**Wyndham Hotels & Resorts**
✆ 877/999-3223 (in U.S. and Canada)
✆ 050/6638-4899 (in U.K.)
www.wyndham.com

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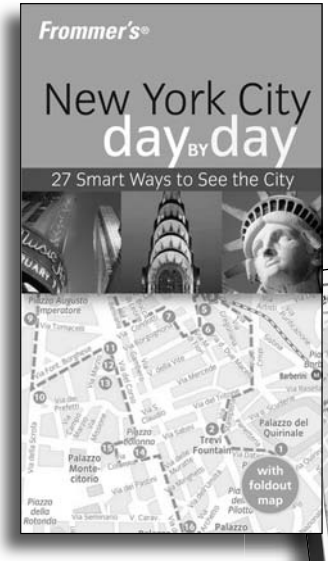


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